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THE AUTHOR WITH THE CHIEF OF THE ZUTUHILE INDIANS (see p. 116)

LAND OF WONDER AND FEAR

By

F. A. MITCHELL-HEDGES

F.R.G.S., F.L.S., F.Z.S., F.E.S., F.R.A.I.

Member of the Maya Committee of the British Museum

With Sixty Illustrations and a Map

DUCKWORTH

3 HENRIETTA STREET, LONDON, W.C.2

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DEDICATED TO
MY FATHER
FROM WHOM I MUST INHERIT
MY WANDER-LUST

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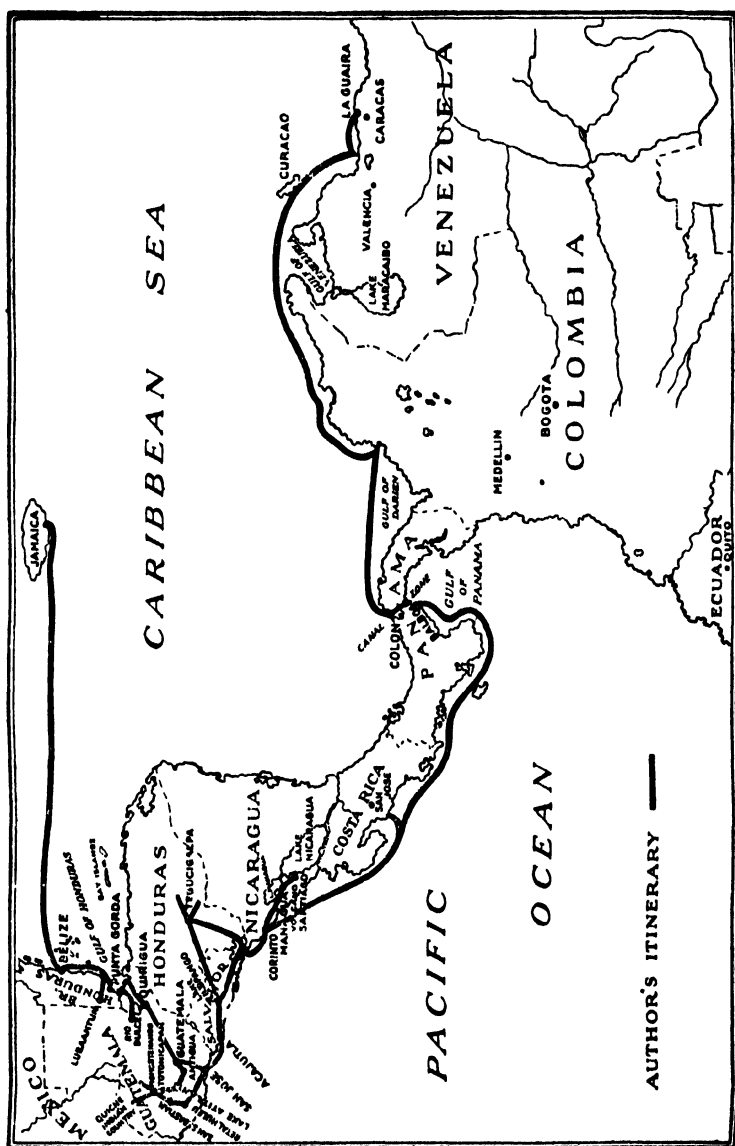
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LAND OF WONDER AND FEAR

YEAR after year, after leading expeditions into the interior of Central America for the British Museum, and, as on my last, for the Museum of the American Indian (Heye Foundation) of New York, I have invariably gone through the same ritual—I have stood on the steamship as it left port down there, cursed the jungles, and sworn that the finest view I have ever seen was the coast-line of Central America disappearing as we steamed away.

Yet, when I arrive in a city like London or New York and visualize the lives of the teeming millions, I know that under no circumstances could I live the rutted existence which is the only life known to them, doing the same thing year after year, yet always striving after sensation.

The majority of men and women in this mechanized age are seeking to extract a thrill out of existence, many by reading the most highly sensational fiction, others by tearing along the great highways in high-power automobiles, deriving a double excitement—the thrill of danger and the breaking of police regulations. The air lends even greater opportunities. The advent of the aeroplane has opened up a fresh field for intense nerve reaction and hair-raising risks. Possibly the greatest gamblers with life are the intrepid men and women who have gambled and lost, or gambled and won, in their flights across the North Atlantic.

Look at the crowd of people, many of whom are so wealthy that \$100,000, or £20,000, one way or another means nothing to them, seated or standing tense round the tables at Monte Carlo, Cannes, Deauville, and the many other casinos of which one knows, gambling with that

strained look on their faces into the small hours of the morning. It is their way of forcing sensation from the god of Chance.

Visit any brokerage house in the United States at the height of a boom or panic. Mark the expressions on the faces of the men and women seated in the easy chairs provided for their comfort, while their eyes never leave the "board." Amidst the monotonous ticking of electric machines the curious little glyphs and signs continually change and the atmosphere vibrates with human emotion. I have seen women, shrieking hysterically, carried out, and men stumbling blindly for the entrance, ruined. They are getting their thrill. They must gamble; it is the breath of their existence.

Stand by a race-course and watch the massed thousands. "They're off!"—the eagerly awaited words roll down the course. Listen to the roar, growing louder and louder, as the horses thunder past; the wild outburst of enthusiasm when a favourite flashes past the winning-post. They are gamblers—the whole world gambles.

Marriage is a gamble; striking out in any business is a gamble; the responsibility of bringing children into the world is a gamble, for veritably a chip off the old block can be a splinter in a mother's heart. Take the accident of birth; one may be born in the purple or in the most wretched slum, one may be born black, high yellow, or white. The whole of life is one great gamble.

From the day of birth to the day of death, conscious or unconscious, within the majority of humanity is that strange urgency; try to control it as we may, the love of risk and desire for excitement is ever-present. But the greatest gamble of all, the greatest thrill any man or woman can experience, is the gamble with life; and it can be obtained in full measure amongst the unexplored jungles and fastnesses of Central America, where what may lie hidden amidst the thousands of square miles still

untrodden has been for all time a closely guarded secret; where what life may be existing is unknown, and one can only speculate on the dangers that are certain to be lurking in these mysterious wilds.

It is some years since I wrote my book *Battles with Giant Fish*. In this I endeavoured, with the help of photographs, to show the grotesque and often gigantic examples of life which exist beneath the waters of the seven seas. I tried to describe the malevolent savagery of many species. Since writing that book I have travelled many thousands of miles through the Central American Republics, up rivers, through swamps, across mountains, and have hacked my way through solid jungles.

The expeditions Lady Richmond Brown and I have led have, I am glad to say, not been unproductive, and have added many fresh archæological and ethnological specimens to the British Museum and to the Museum of the American Indian (Heye Foundation) in New York. I have hesitated for a long time before recording here something of what I have seen and experiences I have had during the last few years—hesitated for this reason: that life in the wilds differs widely from life in civilized countries. To gloss things over would be absurd; a picture of waving palms, coral-sand beaches and scented tropic nights, although delightful reading, would be but a cloak over the sheer ruthlessness and barbarism of the true wilds. And my hesitation has been prompted by the question: Shall I write of the primitive as it is—of a land where the gun is law, where life and laughter go hand in hand with sudden death—a mysterious country, where great ruins lie buried amidst impenetrable jungles—a pre-Adamite land of huge, grotesque reptiles and animals, and myriads of poisonous and deadly insects?

This book is the answer. In living among primitive and degenerate Indian tribes it is impossible not to discover a strange humour—humour of a type which, God knows,

would not be appreciated in civilized countries. To give an accurate history one must write of brute passions, where the lust of blood is ungovernable; where there are no laws to restrain; where the pseudo-morals of great cities do not exist and hypocrisy is unknown; where prostitution for Mammon is non-existent, and where life, although it is not endowed with sanctity as we know it, is a cleaner, finer, simpler thing. Amid the great spaces, the vastness and grandeur of nature, there is no place for petty jealousies, sordidness, and malice. The latent animal in man soon breaks through the thin veneer of culture. The jungle is ruthless, but it cannot be compared with the ruthlessness of our well-ordered cities.

My exploration work in the interior of Central America and among the little-known islands of the Caribbean Sea could never have been accomplished without the great help and encouragement I have received from Sir Frederic Kenyon, Chief Director of the British Museum, during the period over which I write; from that good sportsman, Captain T. A. Joyce of the Ethnological Department of that institution, who has toiled and sweated with me in the jungle and has done great work of which the public knows little; from my friend Mr. George G. Heye, head of the Museum of the American Indian (Heye Foundation), of New York, who has in many ways backed my work; and from Dr. Isaiah Bowman of the American Geographical Society of New York. I should also like to pay a very grateful tribute to Mr. William Randolph Hearst and Mr. T. V. Ranck, since without the unstinted support of the Hearst press much that has been accomplished would have been impossible of achievement. And to my colleague, Lady Richmond Brown, who for years has been closely associated with my work, I cannot pay a higher tribute than to record in this book the great part she has played in making history for Central America, as those who read will learn.

LAND OF WONDER AND FEAR

CHAPTER I

ISLE BEYOND COMPARE

JAMAICA is well named the Queen of the Antilles. Bermuda, the Bahamas, Cuba, and Haiti all have their specific attraction, but for sheer beauty none of them can compare with Jamaica, and my advice to those who have never been there, providing they have the leisure, is to go. It is a very short run from New York, and not really a great distance from England, and once there the traveller will be well repaid so long as he can elevate his mind above that of the usual tourist.

The lightning flashed and the thunder reverberated across the sea. An impenetrable curtain of torrential rain obliterated the Blue Mountains, but not a drop fell in the town of Kingston, and the sun blazed from a cloudless sky—strange, but typically Jamaican. A violent storm over the mountains, yet, but a few miles away, a perfect tropical day.

On disembarking, Lady Brown and I drove straight to the Myrtle Bank Hotel, a five minutes' drive from the docks, and immediately ordered planter's punches.

"Ah," murmured Lady Brown contentedly as she sipped the drink for which the hotel is famous. Then, when only the cherry remained in the bottom of the glass, "It's good to be back here again," she said. And I enthusiastically agreed.

"Before leaving here, let's travel round the island again. What do you think?"

"That's the first intelligent suggestion I have heard you make for months," my companion replied.

"Right-ho—I'll see about it now." And, leaving her with a happy smile and her second planter's punch, in a few minutes I had arranged for a car to be ready for us early the following morning.

It is beyond the town that the true beauty of Jamaica's tropical scenery unfolds at its best—banana and sugar plantations and miles of coco-nut palms. But it is not of these I would speak. It is of the wild, mad riot of colour—every shade of green, flowering trees with their heavy clusters of blossom, the bougainvillaea climbing over tiny bungalows which peep out from masses of red and mauve, scarlet hibiscus and poinsettia—nature revelling in an indiscriminate prodigality of tree, foliage and flower. There are indefinably scented breezes and silky, sensuous nights ; how often have I stood on the balcony of a little inn I know in the mountains—mountains, trees and bush silhouetted blackly against the silver rays of the moon, with the dancing fireflies beneath in the darker shadows to the music of crickets, cicadas and tree-frogs. Those wonderful æolian nights ! But youth and maid—beware. Though common sense may prevail in the colder countries where heart and blood are chilled and senses dulled by environment, here, surrounded by nature and the insistent call and allure which set the blood pulsing through the veins, an elusive something creeps into the very soul, and prudence vanishes like mist before the sun. Maid and youth, again I say, when alone on those miraculously seductive nights made for love and passion—beware !

There was a time when to travel over the roads in the outlying country beyond Kingston was a feat accompanied by great discomfort and actual danger. To-day all that is changed.

We left the hotel next day in an automobile, enjoying at our ease the scenery as it unrolled its beauty. The natives, as always, fascinated us. They carry everything on their heads, from a jam-pot to a four-legged table upside-down

on which are piled all their household effects, when they "flit," as many of them appear to do about once a week; and I have even seen them striding along balancing a coffin. I have yet to see an article fall from their heads. At one time they would look at the stranger sullenly; to-day there is a broad grin for everyone. They are really lovable creatures if treated as human beings.

We motored out to Bath, passing along the foot of the mountains with their giant aloes and cactus growing on the slopes; across the Dry and Yallahs Rivers, then on to White Horses; and, just beyond, the road drops to where it is colonnaded by a grove of coco-nut palms, their varnished fronds interlacing overhead, with a miniature waterfall on the left, and to the right the long, blue-green rollers of the Caribbean thundering in bursts of spray and creaming foam on the sandy beaches.

Bath is well named because of the almost boiling hot spring which bubbles from the earth and is piped into stone baths beneath the tiny inn. The drive up the gulley to reach this heavenly spot impressed us with its eternal beauty, as did the tree-ferns growing beside the burbling stream. Later we sat on the wooden veranda drinking coco-nut water in the virescent shade, and watched the humming-birds flitting around in the sunlight, hovering like hawk-moths; they nest in the vine growing against the side of the house, and their perfectly built little homes are not as large as half an orange.

We travelled on from Bath through Holland, along the coast road through beautiful scenery, and with the Caribbean flashing in the sun and booming against the rocky cliffs, to Bluehole, with its ultra-vivid colouring. The depths reflect every shade of green and blue. A few miles farther on is Port Antonio, where we found every comfort and excellent accommodation. We were enthralled by the beauty of the road back to Kingston from Port Antonio over the mountains, particularly in the region of Castleton

Gardens where the river rushes over immense boulders on its twisting and rocky course to the sea. We alighted here, to be immediately besieged by a swarm of ebony-skinned natives. These itinerant vendors pressed their wares of every possible kind on us, from bananas to baskets, not omitting carved coco-nut shells.

I had wandered alone down to the river and was busy taking a few photographs when I found I had been trailed by a dusky maiden who was anxious to present me with her offspring, a cute little devil, apparently about twelve months old and more like a gollywog than a baby. But as she made it unmistakably plain that she and the child would have to be taken together I conveyed to her my thanks and my emphatic refusal.

On regaining the car, as we drove along I told Lady Brown how I might easily have become a family man.

"I expect you encouraged the poor thing," was her uncompromising answer. It was no use my arguing. No matter what happens, I am always blamed.

When we finally arrived back in Kingston to sip an inevitable planter's punch in easy chairs, we felt that life was well worth living.

A day or two later we drove out through Spanish Town and Mandeville to the Santa Cruz Mountains. From here there is a marvellous view, and it is a hair-raising experience to pass in a car down the steep zigzag road to the plains beneath. Crimson orchids grow from the trunks of the logwood trees on the flats; a few miles farther on we drove beneath a wonderful avenue of bamboos, their thin, feathered tops arched in a delicately sculptured roof above us. As we crossed the bridge of the Black River with its beds of mauve water-hyacinths, we both thought of the time we had spent here, and the fish we had caught in the river, and resolved if possible one day to return.

Resisting the temptation to remain, we continued on to



THE RIVER NEAR CASTLETON GARDENS, JAMAICA



A CORAL ISLAND OFF THE COAST OF BRITISH HONDURAS

Montego Bay with its perfect bathing—a garden of the Hesperides.

I might write for hours on the wonders of Jamaica and still fail to convey a realistic picture of this jewel of the Caribbean.

The people who make up the white population of the town of Kingston are really very friendly, although, as usual, one will find among them cliques who, being nobody, believe they are somebody. The old-fashioned English word applied to shoemakers fits them exactly.

But we had a really good time in Jamaica. It was a relief not to be troubled with absurd regulations and customs officials. We experienced none of the indignities of having all our personal effects mauled on arrival. It is a free, easy, jolly place.

But Jamaica was only the gate to our expedition, and time pressed. We have both been there many times. We never tire of it, and we always feel a twinge of sadness at having to leave. And so it was now. Our visit had been very short, and much work lay ahead of us. As we passed out of the harbour, one of the most beautiful in the world, on board a steamer bound for British Honduras, we looked back with regret at the little town nestling at the foot of the Blue Mountains, which appeared for all the world like pantomime scenery. Port Royal, at the entrance, with its little cluster of red-roofed, bungalow-like houses amongst the coco-nut palms, seemed quite unreal in the early morning sunlight; then slowly the boat pursued her tortuous passage between a tiny island on the starboard side and a coral reef to port. From the deck we could have thrown a stone onto either. Half a dozen pelicans, gorged to repletion, squatted on a projection watching us stupidly. What absurd-looking creatures they are—out of all proportion. Whenever I see these birds I always feel that Nature has been guilty of a most amateurish piece of work, or else has a very unexpected sense of the ridiculous.

Passing parallel with the island until we reached Plum Point, we then turned directly out to sea. Slowly the mountains were swallowed up in the lazy haze. We were on our way to the unknown. Thousands of miles would have to be travelled; before us lay jungles where no white man had ever set foot before, unknown tribes of Indians, insects, fever, heat, and sweat. Impulsively Lady Brown turned to me.

"I wonder if we shall ever see Jamaica again." A note of regret was in her voice.

"Of course we shall," I answered brusquely. "In a few months we shall be back here once more, after the experience of a lifetime."

"I wish we were back again in Black River," she murmured dreamily. "I love that old place. I shall always remember the first tarpon we caught, close to the hyacinth-beds where the river branches—how it blazed like molten silver as it broke water and leapt into the air with the sun shining on its glistening scales! And that wonderful star——"

"What star?"

"Don't you remember? I think it was Venus that shone so brilliantly, just above the ridge of the Santa Cruz Mountains, before daybreak, as we were leaving in the dug-out for the mouth of the river. And how excited we used to be when we first cast out our lines just as the day broke! I wish we were back there."

"It's all very well dwelling on the romantic side of it," I retorted. "But you forget the mosquitoes and sandflies at Five Tree Cove, and the time you were very nearly bogged up to your waist." A withering look stopped me.

"If you had not insisted on my photographing you landing that red-snapper it would never have happened; and there was certainly nothing to laugh at," she added sharply, as the memory of the scene recurred to her.

"How on earth could I help laughing?" I queried.

"You would have done the same if you could have seen yourself trying to photograph the fish and all the time giving me the devil because you had slipped into the bog."

"You know it was entirely your fault. There was no need to have landed the fish at that particular spot," she returned illogically. Then, changing the conversation abruptly, "Do you know where we're going?"

This was rather a poser. I must confess I didn't.

"Oh, well," I prevaricated; "up into the interior and on through Guatemala and the other Republics."

"Yes, but have you any fixed plan?" she persisted. "What's really in your mind?"

"Honestly, it's very difficult to say," I replied. "We have just got to be guided by circumstances and follow our noses. You know," I resumed facetiously, for she seemed low-spirited, "our noses have always stood us in good stead up till now, although I admit we have struck some smelly places." But somehow I could not shake her out of a wretched fit of despondency.

"I know what's the matter with you," I said jokingly. "The whole cause of this depression of yours is clear. You know jolly well you won't get another planter's punch for months."

"Nonsense," she retorted snappishly. "I'm going below." And without another word she went down to her stateroom, leaving me wondering what the devil had upset her so badly.

CHAPTER II

AN UNSAVOURY OUTPOST OF THE EMPIRE

HAVE you ever been to Belize? It is the capital and port of that little-known Crown Colony, British Honduras, sandwiched between Yucatan and Guatemala and bordered by the Caribbean Sea. If you haven't, don't go, unless you have a stomach of cast iron and no sense of smell. It is incredible that in this age the capital of a British colony, with some thousands of inhabitants, ranging from white through every subfusc shade to black, should still remain in the condition in which the traveller will find it to-day. Water system there is none; the only drinking water obtainable is the rain that runs from the roofs of the houses into huge vats. During the dry season the streets are thick with dust; and into these streets are flung much garbage and other filth which under a strong wind, kicked and stirred up by the naked feet of the natives, are driven everywhere to settle on the roofs. "John crows"—vultures—also perch on these same corrugated iron roofs, and the delightful compound that flows, on the arrival of the rainy season, into the drinking-water vats, may be left to the imagination.

There is no drainage. Every morning before eight o'clock and every night after the same hour, the bucket brigade proceeds forth. It is rather horrible to see the native women and children (for the men are left out of this nauseating routine) wandering through the streets carrying every sort of receptacle, and emptying the accumulated sewage either into the harbour, where there is but little rise and fall of tide, or else into a stagnant open canal

which passes through the town. Again I leave undetailed what may be seen and the sickening effluvia which rises from this festering sewer in the tropical heat.

There are other incidentals, such as pools of stagnant water, coated with foul scum, which breed millions of mosquitoes, as anyone visiting there will discover to his cost as soon as the sun sets; not to mention the hosts of land crabs, which infest the small yards of the houses and are such a plague that they are capable of undermining the dwellings.

Once in Belize, there is no escape until a boat arrives, for the reason that there are no roads leading anywhere out of the town, which is hemmed in on every side except towards the coast by thick bush and jungle. It is historical that Belize was built on a swamp filled in with mahogany chips and empty gin bottles. I often wonder why it was built at all. Go where you will, you will find no capital like it.

There is no possible excuse for Belize to remain in the primitive and disgusting condition in which it is to-day. It is incredible that so much money should have been dissipated and wasted on the grandiose schemes of post office and other government buildings, leaving the capital without a water system or any sanitation whatsoever. A few miles down the coast one has only to visit Tela or Puerto Castilla in the Republic of Honduras, neither of which places has a quarter of the population of Belize, to find perfect water and drainage systems. In these two ports (due to that energetic corporation the United Fruit Company) measures, largely successful, have been taken to eliminate mosquitoes and combat dysentery. Tela and Puerto Castilla are a wonderful advertisement for American efficiency. Belize is a disgrace to the British Empire—a monumental blemish—the worst possible advertisement for British administration.

To this day I really do not know what it was, but I think

it was sheer curiosity that originally brought Lady Richmond Brown, the late Mr. Henry Scott Tuke, the famous Royal Academician, and myself to this outpost of the Empire in 1924. Here we had the great good fortune to meet Dr. Thomas Gann, the eminent scientist, who may be said without question to be the greatest living archæological authority on the ancient Maya civilization in the colony.

I shall never forget our Christmas in Belize; and it is difficult to describe, even for one who has experienced it. The entire population of British Honduras is under forty-five thousand. From the native villages miles away in the jungle people pour into the town at this festive season. Distance is no obstacle; serious difficulties in travelling do not deter them, and their journeys are never easy—mules, dug-outs down the rivers or long treks on foot being the only means of reaching the coast.

On the particular Christmas Eve that we spent in Belize, processions marched through the town, of which only women and girls composed the first contingents—the Rosebells, Juvenile Shepherds, etc. They were dressed in white with green sashes, and in blue with mauve sashes. These were followed by an astonishing sight. A body of coloured gentlemen arrayed like Solomon in all his glory proceeded through the streets. First marched a dignified personage carrying an enormous book on a green cushion, on his head a vivid green three-cornered hat in which a scarlet and green feather nodded. Beside him walked a compatriot bearing in a frame the illuminated title of the Order to which they belonged. Long lines of men stretched behind in single file—all coloured. Their dress varied in every particular; startling purples, crimsons, with green and blue sashes, and marvellous aprons beyond description adorned their persons.

Mabs was convulsed with laughter, and I nudged her—not too gently.

"For goodness' sake don't let them see you—devil take it, don't you understand this is a serious business? They'll be angry if they think you are making a joke of them."

"How can I help it?" she gurgled. "Midge, for heaven's sake look at that!" Off she went in another paroxysm, and I must admit I could not keep a straight face. For passing was a gentleman attired in black, his trousers very much frayed and excessively baggy. Age had provided his funereal tail-coat with a greenish tinge; a multi-coloured sash and apron were spread across his ample front, and on his head a very ancient and decrepit top-hat was placed at a perilous angle. Behind him walked three more men, also in black, with hard felt hats on their heads. One man had a hat that was sizes too large for him, with the result that the brim seemed to rest on his ears; another wore a hat much too small, perched on the top of his cranium like a huge wart. Behind came many more patricians wearing green three-cornered hats with feathers, while last of all came the Illustrious Potentates, with what I suppose was their aide-de-camp, for added to his dazzling raiment he was armed with a glittering golden-hilted sword. These strange people confer titles on one another, which they use in conversation and correspondence. It was a never-to-be-forgotten sight—a march of the Potentates of the Jungle. Neither of us would have missed that procession for the world. I shall never forget it as long as I live, and to this day we cannot speak of it without laughing. But this pageant was only the commencement of our entertainment.

About ten o'clock in the evening all the religious denominations turned out with their choirs, the various congregations following. The procession from the Church of St. John the Baptist was truly mediaeval. Headed by the Cross and followed by the canon and choir, the congregation, all dressed in white, streamed behind, holding aloft blazing torches on long staves. It was a remarkable

scene, added to by a Salvation Army detachment lustily singing "Christians, Awake." The next day, being Christmas Day, there were more processions.

The native mind is very simple. I feel I must record the following ludicrous incident. In preface it must be mentioned that in the tropics the majority of Christmas cards show scenes in which the ground, house-tops, and church-spires are all covered with glittering snow, which in these latitudes is unknown. This, as one would expect, has for the natives a religious significance, and many of the people believe that Christ was born in a country covered in snow which specifically descended from Heaven on the occasion of the birth of the Lord. A coloured gentleman obtained a position in New York, and, on his arrival, for the first time in his life he saw the "holy" snow falling and lying thick on the ground. Seized with religious fervour, he at once filled a large wooden box with it and despatched it down to his home in the tropics, that his relations and friends might see the sacred snow amidst which Christ was born. It is unnecessary to add that the box was opened in a temperature of over ninety degrees in the shade.

Boxing Day in Belize is the great event of the year—it is the day of the races. The race-course, which lies almost level with the sea, owing to the heavy rains was already waterlogged. This year a torrential downpour began about five in the morning, and it continued to rain, as only in the tropics it can rain, until eleven o'clock, when the sun broke out, turning the atmosphere into a Turkish bath. In spite of these conditions it seemed that the whole of the capital had assembled on the race-track, and until three o'clock, amidst the mud and water, some really exciting races were run, as can be imagined. About this time, however, a blue-black mass advanced from the sea, and a wall of water descended and continued to thunder down. Soon the flood spread entirely over the course; the grandstand became an island in a lake, and to make matters

worse the tarpaulin covering it collapsed under the weight of water, flooding the people beneath. The remaining races were abandoned, and in any case they could surely never have been run—they would have had to go to the horses that were the best swimmers.

The climax to our Christmas entertainment came when we arrived back at the rather primitive place where we were living to find that in some mysterious fashion a mad dog had got into Dr. Gann's room and made indescribable havoc. Persuasions and threats failed to remove him; he snapped and bit at everything. Sticks were used in an endeavour to drive him out, but quick as lightning he seized them with his teeth, hanging on with remarkable strength. Ultimately, as a last resource, he had to be shot, and it took two hours to clean up the mess and confusion.

I have said this was the climax. But it was not. Lady Brown and I had won, by a miracle, about eighty dollars at the races on a "fifty-fifty" basis, and I forgot to divide the spoils. When I went to my room that night, being very tired and, at that period, unaware of the predatory habits of certain of the natives, I left the money on the dressing-table and tumbled into bed. The next morning to my amazement it had disappeared. During the night a thief had entered my room by climbing up and getting onto the balcony, and had thus acquired the much-prized dollars.

The first words Lady Brown said to me at breakfast were, "Where's my half of the winnings?" Sheepishly I murmured, "Gone."

"What d'you mean—gone?" she enquired, and I told her the sad story.

"Serve you right," she unfeelingly remarked. Her further comments on my stupidity, my mentality, and everything about me may be passed over. The fact remains that I lost money over that race-meeting—I had

to shell out her winnings. There would have been no peace in this world for me if I had not done so. But I was careful after that. As far as that goes, we all were; but in Mr. Tuke's case it availed him nothing. Making assurance doubly sure, he put his money in his trunk and locked it; but in spite of this a thief audaciously entered his room, actually broke open the trunk and stole over a hundred dollars.

Even the financial secretary to the colony was not sacrosanct; for one morning on looking out of his window he saw his white trousers lying in the yard; a silent-footed native had stolen into his room in the night, carried off his trousers, emptied the pockets of money and then flung them away. It is no use complaining to the police; apparently they are quite helpless, for I have never heard of a single member of the light-fingered fraternity being caught. But the knowledge that the natives can enter your room at night with impunity, added to the conglomeration of pestilential smells, plus swarms of mosquitoes, dirty drinking-water and food none too good, does not make Belize exactly a tourists' Arcady.

CHAPTER III

WE START ON THE GREAT ADVENTURE—THE MALEVOLENT LAGOON—MYSTERIOUS ISLANDS

BRITISH HONDURAS has ever been a land of mystery. With hardly a break a sinister and impenetrable jungle covers nine thousand odd square miles. Fifty-five miles south of Belize, the capital, the Cockscomb Mountains rise in three ranges, one behind the other, and here there are fastnesses which up to the present no white foot has ever trodden. The Carib Indians narrate remarkable tales of tribes that inhabit these unknown regions, using even to-day the prehistoric flint-headed arrow and spear reminiscent of the Stone Age, while rumour avers their religious rites embrace the revolting practice of voodooism. Personally I am very sceptical of these stories, though of course it is possible there may be isolated Indian tribes who, reduced to a pitiful remnant and completely cut off from civilization, may live in a state of extreme degeneration quite unknown to the ethnologist.

It is reported that some years ago a prospector penetrated into the Cockscombs. For a considerable time he disappeared, and was believed to have perished; but one day it is said he reappeared, evading all questions and refusing details. Yet it is believed he found gold and actually made a rich strike; though as to whether he brought out any large quantity of the precious metal rumour is vague. But it would not in the least surprise me.

From twelve to fifty miles off-shore along the entire coast of British Honduras, innumerable tiny islands and coral reefs rise from the hot tropic waters, and no pen can

describe the Elysian beauty of the scenery. The lazy rollers curl and break on these reefs leaving a white line of surf, and in the lee of the barriers rise the emerald-green, palm-clad islands with their blinding white coral-sand beaches. The translucent water surrounding them is ever changing—rose-pink at sunrise, tawny orange deepening to scarlet as the rim of the setting sun touches the horizon and sinks in a sea of blood; while at noon every shade is reflected from vivid jade green to the deepest of purple and sapphire blue. To add to their beauty several of these islands have colonies of butterflies (fritillaries) which appear to be quite local; the family of coleoptera is also represented by a bright green beetle that glistens like a jewel in the sun.

At Belize we chartered a 75-ton auxiliary schooner, manned by a coloured crew of nine. Our party consisted of Lady Richmond Brown, the late Mr. H. S. Tuke, who came with us in order to depict on canvas the true atmosphere of the tropics, Dr. Thomas Gann, and myself. Loading up with stores, axes, shovels, two or three dozen machetes, canned food and the usual camping impedimenta, we left Belize to thread the reefs and islands which entail unceasing vigilance and local knowledge, to Punta Gorda, 120 miles to the south.

As the boat, with the engine running and all sails set, began to glide through the water, Lady Brown expressed my feelings exactly when looking towards the town of Belize from the stern she said, "Thank God we are leaving that pestilential hole."

Towards evening we dropped anchor at Tobacco Cay, a small coral island covered in coco-nut palms. A mile from here to the west lies a narrow mangrove island called The Range, which we determined to explore thoroughly for Maya burial mounds; and the next morning, running out in the schooner, we anchored close under the lee and within a stone's throw of the mangrove trees that fringe the water.

Piling into the large dug-out we had brought, we were paddled along close to the shore until we found a break in the mangroves and landed on a beach of fine coral sand which stretched some little distance towards the interior of the island. Here, near the water's edge, we found huge heaps of conch, whelk, and other shells, and amongst these by careful searching, numbers of potsherds, fragments of obsidian knives and flint chips, net-sinkers, spindlewhorls, clay beads, etc.—relics of its pre-Columbian occupation. The cay had probably never been permanently inhabited by the Maya, but had been used from time to time as a fishing station; for not a single burial mound, sure sign of permanent occupation, was to be found on any part of it. The sole inhabitant was a half-grown pig which followed us wherever we went, squealing and grunting horribly until we gathered and split a number of coco-nuts for it, which it at once greedily devoured. It is a mystery how this unfortunate animal managed to exist; though the caymen assert that large hogs when driven by hunger are capable of husking and cracking fallen coco-nuts with their teeth.

Apart from our large dug-out we had brought with us a cranky little six-foot boat hollowed out of a cottonwood log, and in this precarious craft Dr. Gann insisted on paddling round the island. We pointed out to him the absurdity of it, but be it known the doctor is a man of much determination, and it is questionable if a volcanic eruption and earthquake combined would have deterred him when he had once conceived the idea. We chaffed him unmercifully as he seated himself gingerly within the crazy, ominously rocking boat.

"Bet you anything you like you don't go a hundred yards," hazarded Mr. Tuke.

"My dear doctor," cooed Lady Brown, choosing her words carefully. "I trust the little promise you made to me that I should not be forgotten in your will has been attended to?"

The doctor, disdaining a reply, dug his paddle viciously in the water, and at the very first stroke came near to turning turtle, while we howled with laughter. Why the boat did not capsize at once I don't know, but he must have travelled nearly a hundred yards when the inevitable happened. He lost his equilibrium, and his contortions in trying to keep his craft from turning over for a few seconds were ludicrous. The next thing we saw was a smother of water in the centre of which protruded the hatless head of the doctor. But he had turned over very neatly, and had been most fortunate in choosing the shallows out of reach of the sharks which are numerous here.

We watched him wading back, towing his apology for a dug-out after him. As he came close to the schooner we were most solicitous in our enquiries as to what discoveries he had made on his voyage of exploration—had he recovered any marine specimens? He appeared quite subdued; but this we soon found was a mantle of cunning, for as he reached the side of the schooner, without warning he spanked the water with his paddle, sending up a sheet of spray which smothered us—and then *he* laughed.

After he had joined us on board and peace was restored, he discovered he had lost his hat, which could be seen in the distance floating on the water. The natives retrieved this for him, and after he had dried somewhat we all set out in our sensible dug-out.

Paddling half a mile to the north we observed a narrow passage through the mangroves, and travelling up a low tunnel-like opening some fifty yards in length, completely arched over by mangrove branches, we suddenly entered a deep oval lagoon in the centre of the island. Snakey, intertwining roots of gigantic mangrove trees walled us in, no air could enter here. An uncanny silence prevailed and the overpowering strength of decaying vegetation caught one by the throat. The dark green, motionless water was thinly covered with yellow scum. The intense humidity

coupled with the terrific rays of the tropical sun made us gasp and rendered the slightest exertion intolerable. Although the silence was palpable, life abounded on all sides. Flat, shiny black crabs crawled among the mangrove roots; multi-coloured lizards ran nimbly along the branches, and large barracouda swam fearlessly close to the dug-out, so that great care became necessary. With these savage and ravenous fish in such near proximity an upset would probably have ended in a brief swirl of blood-stained water and an empty dug-out floating on the slimy surface, for the creatures do not know the meaning of fear.

There was something horrific and repellent about this lagoon. Adhering to the submerged mangrove roots were great masses of amorphous, greyish-black matter which, on being detached, squirmed and bellied like fragments of primordial protoplasm, simplest form of life. This rapidly putrefied in the sun, and stank horribly. It made us feel that we had been suddenly transported into an age millions of years ago; and when, fixed unblinkingly on us from a rotting branch, we caught the malignant black eye of a great "matlala," or crested lizard—one of the most hideous reptiles in existence—we wondered what we should see next. In this weird spot, so far removed from the world of to-day, we felt that almost anything might suddenly appear; and had the waters of the lagoon opened and the long, slender neck and savage head of a giant saurian emerged, it would have been quite in keeping with this sinister place.

As we paddled out, at the entrance to the tunnel-like opening pelicans sat on a bough within a few feet of our heads. They were quite unafraid, merely eyeing us curiously; then, observing something much more interesting than ourselves, they swooped down and plunged into the sea close to the dug-out. As their heads rose above the water, fish could plainly be seen wriggling in the pouches beneath their long bills. A convulsive gulp, a wag of the

tail in pure enjoyment, and they were off again on their never-ending search for food.

We continued in the boat until we reached the southernmost point, where we found that what we had imagined to be one island resolved itself into two; for there was a passage like a river, about thirty yards in width, cutting through. As we crept slowly along, a sea-eagle rose from her nest which could be clearly seen—a large flat structure built in the tops of the low mangroves. Birds'-nesting and making fires are two of Lady Brown's weaknesses; and come what might she had to be landed amongst the tangled roots. We all thought we might as well have a look, and with Lady Brown leading we started to crawl through that labyrinth, which can only be done on all-fours. Mr. Tuke voiced our thoughts when he suddenly remarked, "Look at Lady B. reverting to type!" And that is just how we all must have looked—four apes crawling through a jungle of roots.

We very shortly agreed that the eagle's nest was not worth the exertion; we were soaked with perspiration when we returned to the dug-out. Regaining the schooner we found that the natives on board had not been idle. They had whiled away the time by usefully catching twenty or thirty yellowtails, and a good fish meal was not to be despised.

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Regretfully we left this vicinity—we could have profitably spent more time here, but we had to get on; and the following day we ran in towards the mainland. As darkness fell the schooner dropped anchor off Placencia, a tiny native settlement surrounded by thick bush, and at day-break the next morning we left for the last part of our run to Punta Gorda.

All along the coast the dense jungle comes down to the edge of the sea, while behind towers a fantastically turreted range of mountains. We could see no sign of life. A few



1. REVERTING TO TYPE

2. CROSSING THE RAPIDS

miles below Placencia the wall of jungle opens, and for miles inland lies a great lagoon. Until now no human being, as far as I can discover, has investigated what fish or other creatures live in this almost landlocked sheet of water; but the Indians state that it is the home of numerous and very large "manatee" (sea-cows) and also alligators, while it would appear from their stilted descriptions that nearby is erected a tall mound. As a matter of fact we could see this from the sea, but whether it was a Maya burial mound or one of the signalling stations they were known to have built along the coast it is not possible to say.

We had to pass an island called Wild Cane Cay, and since it was not out of our way we thought we might as well drop anchor and see if there were any traces of the Maya here. It was only a very small island, and within a short time we were fortunate in locating three burial mounds, all that remained of a small migratory section of this remarkable people; though why they should have chosen Wild Cane Cay to settle on is inexplicable, for a more damnable place it would be hard to find. Mosquitoes were here in millions, and there was no sleep for any of us that night; in fact the only way in which we could obtain relief at all was by collecting a heap of coco-nut husks, firing it, and crouching in the swirling smoke. In spite of the winged pests we spent a full day in the excavation of one of the mounds, finding a number of clay beads and two of jadeite. We also unearthed a red pottery incense-burner (one side exhibiting a repellent mask-like face) and some large flint spear- and arrow-heads. I imagine that one would be well rewarded by further excavating at Wild Cane Cay; but leaving our work on the mounds on this insect-swarmed island, we returned to the schooner.

Lady Brown and Mr. Tuke had been frightfully bitten; their faces were much swollen and inflamed, and Lady Brown's left eye was completely closed.

“ What do I look like? ” she asked pathetically.

“ Well,” I temporized, “ if you honestly must know, I shouldn’t recognize you if I met you in the street.” And added, “ They say everything is sent on earth for a purpose, but I’m hanged if I can see the use of mosquitoes.”

We all thanked God to see the back of Wild Cane Cay— (I should like to change the name to “ Misery Island ”)— and without delay we hauled up the anchor and in one run made Punta Gorda.

CHAPTER IV

REMARKABLE NATIVE CEREMONIES AND CUSTOMS—RUMOURS OF RUINS BURIED IN THE JUNGLE REACH US—WE LEAVE FOR THE INTERIOR

THE little town of Punta Gorda is close to the Guatemalan border of British Honduras, and some of what I should say is the most beautiful scenery in the world is adjacent to it, while in their upper reaches the rivers Moho and Temash, which empty a few miles to the south, are still, I believe, totally unexplored.

Punta Gorda is a small collection of wooden houses and thatched adobe dwellings standing on the edge of the Caribbean Sea, with a wall of jungle behind and on either side. The inhabitants are nearly all Caribs, those curious, negroid Indians who, coming originally from Brazil (their stronghold, I believe, was the region of the Amazon delta), spread through the West Indies and along the coast of South and Central America as far as Mexico, exterminating the males of the original population and enslaving the women. This may account for the fact that the Carib men even to-day speak one language and the women another. The women understand and use the men's tongue, but employ their own exclusively when conversing among themselves. The men, apparently, never speak the women's language, nor do they appear to understand it. Obviously the female of this race has a decided advantage over her emancipated sister.

It is remarkable to see the different types that make this their trading Mecca; dark-skinned natives in their tiny, white-sailed dug-outs arrive from Guatemala, the Republic

of Honduras and the outer cays; mahogany-coloured bastard Caribs, thick-lipped, round-faced, their skins glistening like satin, come in from the adjacent bush. From the interior, through jungle trails known only to themselves, come the Maya Kekchi Indians, each with his woman walking solemnly behind and invariably carrying a baby on her hip. Their wants are simple, their most valued possessions being a hurricane lamp, an empty five-gallon petrol tin, and a machete. They are never without these huge knives which are over two feet in length and hang from their waists in a scabbard.

Shading the houses of Punta Gorda are graceful palms, flowering hibiscus, oleanders, and a wealth of other tropical plants. Gorgeous butterflies and humming-birds flit continually to and fro; yet in this riot of beauty there is the ever-present curse of the tropics—insects. In Punta Gorda it is a species of redbug—a tiny cochineal-coloured tick invisible to the naked eye. These are literally a pest, raising red inflamed bumps all over the body. Even after leaving the locality, when one has been infested with these minute parasites the irritation lasts for weeks and makes sleep almost impossible. The advice “Don’t scratch,” though doubtless well meant, is futile.

In the town one also finds black hornets whose sting is agony, and many species of doctor-flies (*Tabanidæ*) and scorpions. A remarkable case occurred while we were there. A native girl was struck in the big toe by a large scorpion; and so violent was the strike that the creature was unable to withdraw its poisonous sting which was not removed until it had actually been crushed. The girl suffered very great pain; her foot swelled enormously, and she experienced great difficulty in swallowing.

The natives of Punta Gorda—I speak of the coloured people—are strongly imbued with a combination of necromancy, obiism, and ghost-lore. Death appeals to their imagination as a mournful state of transition in which they

must rejoice. I don't know which is the worse—our farce of expensive casket, flowers, sycophant mourners, purchase of land in consecrated ground and the deep intoning of the priest, which turn the most tremendous tragedy of our lives into a mockery, or the extreme to which these primitive people go.

A day or two after our arrival a native died on the outskirts of the town, and his death was the signal for the assembling of all his relations and their friends. The corpse lay in its rough box on the earth floor of a thatched wooden shack; the mourners crowding the little hut and swarming outside wailed continuously. "White Eye" (white rum) flowed freely, and the raw spirit soon had its effect. The wailing changed towards evening to maudlin song; shortly two or three of the bereaved began playing various instruments, and the massed singing, at first a dirge, altered by slow stages to jollity and finally ribaldry. About midnight the natives were going all out in a pandemonium of dancing and shouting, while the music grew more discordant, erratic, and louder than ever.

By now all the men and women were in a more or less advanced state of drunkenness; and then, as was to be expected, trouble started. One of the natives kissed another man's woman; she probably didn't mind, but her man did, and a fight started which quickly spread amongst them all. Without any sense, rhyme, or reason they began pummelling one another. Many, so drunk they could hardly stand, fell on the ground still fighting and striking out with their hands and feet indiscriminately at friend and foe. In the midst of the fracas somebody knocked over an oil-lamp, and in a few minutes the shack was ablaze and became a funeral pyre. The fight finished abruptly, and in haste the natives all bolted for the open—it was everyone for himself, and no thought was given to the corpse reposing in its box. I heard subsequently it was considered a very bad omen for the future of the departed.

The most important gathering and ritual takes place on the Ninth Night. It is believed by the natives that nine nights after death the spirit of the dead person tries to return and take up its abode where formerly it had lived in the flesh. And unless extreme measures are taken this disembodied soul will remain there and be unable to reach its Valhalla. From the time of death great preparations are made, large quantities of food and still larger quantities of drink are accumulated, and all the relatives and others assemble for the Ninth Night orgy. As soon as it is dark the serious business is begun of driving the spirit from the house, which only a vast amount of noise can do. A tremendous hullabaloo arises; tom-toms are beaten, boards are hammered with blocks of wood; there is much shrieking and shouting and leaping up and down. Every conceivable means of producing noise is employed until, in the early hours of the morning—sometimes even at daybreak—from sheer exhaustion and the effects of drink the exorcisers collapse in a prostrate condition. But on waking all are happy, secure in the belief that they have driven away the spirit, and that it is now safely *en route* for their own heaven. A strange people—excitable and fanatical to a degree.

Send out thousands of missionaries, preach the gospel from morning to night—the inherited traditions and beliefs of the native will persist. He may pretend to accept, but he never really does. A vivid example of this occurred in a certain part of Central America. A newly appointed church dignitary found that marriage as we know it was unknown among the natives. With religious zeal he immediately commenced the good work, which in theory was excellent, of teaching them the beauty and godliness of the married state. The natives, not understanding in the least what it was all about, agreed cheerfully to every suggestion, and the elated clergyman had quite a busy time performing marriage ceremonies in the orthodox manner. That was all very well until after a

time, as was only natural, several husbands and wives discovered they were unsuitably mated and living a cat-and-dog life. Whereupon they went to the clergyman and poured out their tale of woe.

Judicially he explained the position—they had been bound in holy matrimony until death did them part—simple words, but interpreted by the native mind in a way the reverend man least expected. They were tied together until death separated them—the God-man had said so—very well, one must die before the other could be freed. So they promptly set about scheming one another's deaths, and naturally resorted to the Obeah man with the result, so I believe, that an epidemic of deaths broke out among the married Indians, and the clergyman has now given up his previous ideas in that direction.

At Punta Gorda the vague rumours we had heard in Belize of large stones lying buried in the interior became more definite. It was doubtless from the Indians who come down to this trading station in the dry season that the natives of Punta Gorda had learned of ruins grown over by the jungle. It was reported that the direct descendants of the very people who had erected this city were still living in the shadow of the buildings whose glory had long since departed, and we made up our minds that at all costs we would test the truth of these reports.

"I think it would be best for Dr. Gann and me to go alone," I said to Lady Brown.

"You will not," she answered definitely.

We argued for some time. Vainly I pointed out to her that we had not the faintest idea where we were going or what we might encounter; I might just as well have saved my breath. But when I came to tackle Mr. Tuke, strangely enough she sided with me, and was most emphatic that it would be lunacy for him to attempt the journey. But just as I had been butting my head against a stone wall in trying to convince Lady Brown, so we now found we might

as well try to move a mountain as dissuade our old friend from accompanying us; in fact, he became quite annoyed when we mentioned his age as a reason. (He was nearer seventy than sixty.) So against my judgment I had perforce to give in.

We were aware of the great difficulties that would have to be surmounted; but decided that the easiest and in fact the only way, as far as we could see, for us to penetrate the interior was by travelling up a river—the Rio Grande—five miles to the north of Punta Gorda. And once having made up our minds, Dr. Gann and I with the help of one or two of the natives managed to engage two very ancient and weather-beaten dug-outs in a well-advanced stage of decrepitude, hollowed from great cedar logs and looking as if they had been laid up for ages. We were able to hire a pitiful crew consisting of three small Carib boys and a couple of half-breeds. The Colonial Secretary had lent us a small motor-launch, and we hoped with this to be able to tow the dug-outs up the river.

Really, when I look back on it, had we all met our end it would have been only what we deserved. Lady Brown, Dr. Gann, and I should certainly have known better. We were no novices in penetrating the jungle, and should have realized from experience the madness of what we were attempting. But of course to Mr. Tuke it was all new. However, carried away by the lure of discovering a buried city, on an unlucky day we left Punta Gorda, our schooner towing the small motor-launch and two dug-outs. As we were travelling along the coast towards the river, I noticed that Lady Brown was far from elated, and certainly not her usual self.

“What are you worrying about?” I enquired.

She answered, “I have a premonition of trouble.” Foolish as it may seem, instead of laughing I took her quite seriously, because on several previous occasions when she had had a hunch, strange to say it had proved correct.

“ What do you mean by ‘ trouble ’ ? ”

“ I don’t know—it’s just a feeling I’ve got. You know,” she continued, “ I’m usually right, and I feel we shall never get up the river.” For the life of me at that time I could not imagine why; but later we were all to have an experience which personally I shall never forget.

On an unrippled sea and in the most perfect weather we arrived at the mouth of the river, which was a series of sandbars strewn with gigantic mahogany and other trees carried down by the flood in the wet season. To attempt to navigate the schooner across the tree-strewn bars was out of the question; but more by luck than judgment, and by the expedient of the natives going ahead in a dug-out and testing the depth of the water with their poles, we were able finally to negotiate the motor-boat and both dug-outs without mishap across and into the deep water of the river. With the dug-outs tied to the stern of the launch we proceeded up against the sluggish stream in a procession of three. Several times I cast an apprehensive eye on the overloaded dug-outs in which was our entire camping-outfit, including—most indispensable of all—our food supplies.

CHAPTER V

THE DISASTER ON THE RIO GRANDE—A NIGHT OF HELL

THE river here was shut in by endless stretches of flat mangrove swamp, and the smell effervescing as the sun beat down on the ooze rose up stifflingly in the hot, steaming atmosphere. We were soon reduced to a state of sweating inertia, literally gasping for breath, and the target for swarms of mosquitoes, botlas-flies, and tabanidæ which stung and pumped their poison into us until all the exposed parts of our bodies were covered with itching bumps, and our faces and hands were swollen to twice their natural size. For over two hours we endured this torment; and then the mangrove swamps gave place to high bush and the scenery became magnificent. The banks were clothed with a dense growth of bamboo and pimento, backed by giant tropical trees interspersed with graceful cohune and royal palms from whose summits trailed masses of liana covered in convolvuli, orchids, and airplants, while parrots and other birds of brilliant plumage flew between. One great Santa Maria tree had suspended from its topmost branches a colony of the hanging nests of that beautiful bird, the yellow-tail. These nests are curiously woven and are nearly four feet in length. They swing at a dizzy height from the ground on the slimmest of boughs, and are purposely slung by their builders in what appears to be a precarious situation, to protect eggs, and later the young, from snakes and other predatory creatures.

About midday we came to a small clearing on the left bank. Here we landed. The heat was merciless, and while awaiting the boiling of the billy we were glad to stretch ourselves

out at full length in the shade of a cohune palm—another act of gross stupidity which God knows we paid for later.

After leaving here, about twenty miles up the current became much stronger, and the river was full of snags and fallen trees which made steering with the two dug-outs in tow very difficult. Our forces were divided—Dr. Gann being in the second dug-out which, as it was the larger, held nearly the whole of our stores, while I was in the motor-launch with Lady Brown and Mr. Tuke. For the next few miles we were in momentary fear of the dug-outs capsizing on snags; and every time we in front had to negotiate one I howled out warnings to Dr. Gann, who should have changed his steersman, a miserable little Carib boy with only two objects in life—to sleep and eat. Ahead of us two fallen trees left a passage of only a few feet. The motor-boat passed through; the first dug-out followed with a narrow margin of safety. We all roared to the doctor, for we saw that disaster was inevitable. Too late he realized the danger—with a thud his dug-out struck the snag and rocked violently, half-filling with water. Our tow-rope gave a vicious yank at the same moment, causing his craft to shoot into the steep clay bank. And as the bows struck the boat rolled over, flinging Dr. Gann, the Carib boys and all our stores into eighteen feet of turbid water. As the doctor's head emerged, unpardonably but irresistibly I shouted, "Doctor, I warned you!" And—ye gods!—his reply was unprintable.

He scrambled up the bank from which we rescued him plastered from head to foot with thick yellow clay. Bobbing on the river and careening downstream was a heterogeneous collection of clothes, oranges and grapefruit, packing-cases, and grinning, woolly-headed Caribs. We made the latter dive, and in this way recovered an axe-head and a very small amount of our tinned food; but the vast majority of our baggage, including the medicine-chest and surgical instruments, was totally lost.

It was too much for the doctor. With a flow of language which in its lurid extensiveness proclaimed his scientific erudition in that particular branch, he glared round for a weapon and his eyes rested on the three or four oranges that had been saved from the river. To our consternation, seizing them he hurled them at the Caribs who were still enjoying themselves hugely in the water, when, in spite of the seriousness of our predicament, we all had to laugh—with one exception, the doctor.

"Dive—damn you!" he shouted in English, forgetting in his rage that they could not understand a word he was saying. Then suddenly remembering, he exploded into Spanish, swearing vengeance if they did not continue their diving and recover his beloved case of instruments. But it was useless.

The ridiculous and the tragic often go hand in hand. Nothing could have been more laughable than the sight of the irate doctor standing like a drowned rat, covered with yellow clay, swearing and hurling oranges at grinning Caribs bobbing up and down in the river. And yet it was a tragedy: we had lost our stores, we had lost the whole of our equipment for excavating. It was disaster.

The accident had absorbed the whole of our attention so that we were entirely oblivious of the fact that we were fast becoming enveloped in darkness. It was now late afternoon, and we had a shock when we saw that a blue-black mass completely obscured the sun. Faintly on the air, then louder and still louder, was borne a strange rushing noise. We looked at one another—words were unnecessary. Then suddenly with a hissing roar the full force of the deluge burst upon us. Any attempt to return was out of the question, as it was far too late in the day, and in any case the wall of water now descending would have obscured the snags in the river and made navigation impossible. We were in a desperate condition. To find an opening in the impenetrable jungle which closed us in



SNAGS AND FALLEN TREES.

OUR SUPPLIES ENDANGERED

on either side became imperative. We started the motor-boat, and, again towing the two dug-outs, went ahead, gambling on the chance of missing the snags. It was the only thing to do. Luck favoured us, and a few miles further up we espied the remains of a small palm-leaf shelter erected by Indians who had at one time made a camp there. Immediately opposite this haven of refuge the river shallowed and cascaded in rapids. Suddenly the motor-boat struck a submerged rock with a crash, and the engine stopped dead. By a stupendous effort we managed to pole and work our way towards the bank, hanging on for dear life to the gnarled tree-roots which grew from the side, and by the aid of these succeeded in climbing the slippery bank, smothering ourselves in thick clay in the process.

By the time we reached the top it was almost dark, and mosquitoes surrounded us in millions with that loud and incessant drone which is the most hateful sound in the tropics. With difficulty we got a fire going with some melted candles we had saved, and then found that by standing in the dense smoke from the wet wood we could obtain some relief from the mosquitoes which were sucking the blood from every part of our anatomy. Each time we were compelled to leave this sanctuary, coughing and streaming at the eyes, the vicious swarms settled on us again. They were of that very large species, the striker, and our clothes offered no protection, their probosces penetrating through to the flesh.

Now commenced a dreadful night. To attempt to sleep was out of the question. We piled log after log on the increasing blaze until we had a great fire roaring. About ten p.m. our attention was diverted by the screaming of two jaguars, and crashes in the jungle nearby warned us they were well on the alert. I slipped a couple of shells loaded with buckshot into my twelve-bore and felt happier. Mr. Tuke was suffering the tortures of the damned, being

in a terrible state of irritation, as was Lady Brown. Three times during the night the good old sportsman remarked: "I wish I could see a vampire bat," no doubt the only thing he could think of which could enhance his misery. But not one word of complaint rose from any of them. It is in a serious emergency that one really gets to know people; and no greater strain could have been put on human endurance than that through which we were passing.

Towards morning life became almost unbearable. The pitiless rain continued, and when grey dawn broke we were indeed in a sorry condition. Every one of us was bitten from head to foot, and our faces were so swollen that the flesh bagged beneath our eyes. To eat was impossible. Tea was produced from somewhere, and this, even without milk and sugar, proved a godsend. At daybreak we broke a miserable camp, and with the Caribs paddling ahead struggled upstream under a leaden sky and torrential downpour, in a desperate endeavour to reach the Indian tribe we had been led to believe had a village somewhere on or near the banks of the river.

Now that it was light we quickly discovered that the mosquitoes alone were not responsible for the violent itch from which we were all suffering. We found ourselves covered with thousands of ticks, each attached to the summit of a little mound of inflamed skin. These had undoubtedly been acquired the previous day when we had forgetfully stretched ourselves out on the ground at the first clearing.

The river, owing to the downpour, commenced to rise in flood, and logs and trees became so numerous that the utmost difficulty faced us in proceeding. After an hour of hazardous experience, the motor-boat ran on a submerged log and nearly capsized. With great difficulty we managed to get her off. By now we all realized that our position was indeed grave, and held council to decide on

the best course to pursue. Unanimously we felt that to continue the journey would be madness, and would more than likely result in our deaths. The bush on either side of the river was absolutely impenetrable, and there could be no hope for any of us if the boats were irrevocably lost. There was but one thing to do, and very reluctantly we turned back. All day we travelled through the tropical downpour; how we escaped capsizing on the many snags into which we bumped we never knew—or cared. We were faint from exposure, lack of food and loss of blood drained from us by the myriads of mosquitoes and ticks. Every now and again violent shivers shook us—ague; and we prayed that this was not the forerunner of malarial fever.

In starting out on our journey we had come as far as the mouth of the river in the schooner; and had then sent the vessel back to Punta Gorda to await our return, as there was no idea we should require it again soon. When we emerged from the river into the open sea we were met by a stiff breeze and rough water, waves breaking continuously over the little motor-boat and dug-outs. But we were in such a state that we philosophically accepted any fresh disasters as they came—nothing mattered very much. We were like the poor creatures who suffer the extremes of sea-sickness—the first day they are afraid they will die; the second day they feel sure they will, and the third day they are afraid they won't. By the time we sighted the town I think we had all reached the numb stage.

On arriving at Punta Gorda we were taken in charge by Dr. Hetherington, the A.M.O., and Mr. MacCall, District Commissioner. Strong ammonia baths did much to alleviate our intense irritation and clean our bodies of ticks, though, for days after, our appearance gave the impression that we were suffering from smallpox. The heavy rain continued all night and next day, but we were determined not to give up our attempt to reach the ruins.

Dr. Gann and I finally settled we would try on horseback,

but flatly refused to allow Lady Brown and Mr. Tuke to join us in our plunge into the interior, since we were completely ignorant of what lay before us. Thanks to the good offices of Mr. MacCall and Dr. Hetherington we obtained horses, and all arrangements were made; and ultimately, carrying our supplies on a pack animal, we left on our wild gamble.

CHAPTER VI

A TERRIBLE RIDE—OUR MEETING WITH THE MAYA KEKCHI INDIANS—WE DISCOVER THE RUINED CITY

FOR the first eight miles we rode through beautiful open country, vast stretches of grassland dotted with immense trees. It might have been an English park had it not been for the coco, cohune, and royal palms which reminded us we were in the tropics. On leaving the open country we entered virgin forest through a ribbon-like track of mud and mud-holes, closed in on either side by low scrub, every tree and shrub of which contained something objectionable in the form of a thorn, rasp, or poison, the worst being the lancietta palm, a small tree whose trunk is covered with slender, stiff, two-inch spikes keen as a surgeon's lancet ; though a vine covered with minute hooked spicules capable of removing a square inch of skin at a rub runs it a close second. As the tendency of the horses invariably was to press as near as possible into the bush at the sides to escape the mud-holes which were worse in the centre of the track, constant vigilance was needed to avoid having our clothes and skin torn.

Shortly we came to a creek—fortunately the flood water had run off considerably. The steep, slippery clay banks were ominous and nearly proved my undoing. In trying to climb out on the far side my horse slipped and fell back on me. I just managed to wriggle clear of the saddle in time. A few miles farther on we came to a small river running through a deep canyon-like cutting in the sandstone—a formidable barrier, and quite unfordable when in flood. I should think this ford must be unique in the fact

that it has a graveyard of its own; within a hundred yards of the crossing are buried those unfortunate Indians who have been drowned while trying to cross during the rainy season.

How we managed to reach the other side I don't know—the gods must have smiled on us; but here it was Gann's turn nearly to come to grief. His horse's hind leg wedged fast in a cleft between two boulders, and it was only a miracle that saved the animal from falling, with the certainty of a broken leg. As it was, it took us a quarter of an hour to release the poor creature.

Beyond, the track became narrower, and more difficult to follow. The mud-holes and swampy places were deeper and more frequent until finally we struck a morass. To follow it around was out of the question, as, apart from not knowing its extent, it would have entailed hacking our way through the dense bush with our machetes. Gann turned to me.

"Pleasant sort of place, eh? We've got to go ahead and chance it—no other way."

The fact was obvious; though I was not enamoured of the prospect. The thought of riding into a bog where your horse and yourself might disappear beneath the mud at any moment did not elate me.

"Say your prayers, my boy," the doctor called out from ahead. "You'll need help." And his words were prophetic.

Floundering at every step, in one part our horses were bogged to their withers, while we were smothered in slime. There were times when I expected that the animals, together with ourselves, would become engulfed as I had visualized, and disappear completely. But *poco-poco* (little by little) we squelched our way on.

"Doctor, old dear," I said; "you and I, if we ever return, had better be medically examined. I'll swear we're mental. Only lunatics would ever choose this sort

of thing when there is no need. This place puts me in mind of Broadway—being so different.”

Gann chuckled.

“Think of the Savoy, or the Embassy Club, or your beloved Cornwall.”

There are times when I positively dislike that man. Imagine ploughing through a swamp, never knowing but that the next quarter of an hour may be your last, drenched through with perspiration in a temperature of over a hundred in the shade, eaten alive with mosquitoes and ticks, and God only knowing whether you would ever return—to be reminded of the Savoy.

But our luck held. It was certainly good luck and not judgment that ultimately brought us onto firm ground, only to find a little farther on that our progress was cut off and the almost invisible track blocked by a great fallen cotton tree. We looked at one another blankly. We were bushed in scrub so dense that nothing could be seen three yards away in any direction. The setting sun was low in the heavens, and the song of the mosquitoes was so loud that it dominated every other sound. Another night of hell appeared inevitable. This choice was open to us—to circle the obstruction by hacking our way through the jungle, and push on at the risk of being permanently bushed in primeval forest where man is less than a grain of mustard-seed, or to camp where we were. We were contemplating the latter, but the mosquitoes settled the question for us. So light had we been compelled to travel that mosquito-nets had been discarded, and without these it was very doubtful, after what we had passed through, whether we could survive a night in the bush. So we pushed on in a general northerly direction, the continual cutting with our machetes in some measure driving the insect pests away.

Luck was certainly with us, and we were fortunate enough, just as night [fell, to strike either our old trail or another. This we had followed for some distance when I

heard a cock crow, as these birds do at any and every hour in the tropics.

"Gann!" I shouted (for our positions were now reversed and the doctor was some yards behind me—I suppose he thought it was my turn to do the hard work and clear the way with the machete)—"did you hear that cock crowing?"

My voice must have carried, for a chorus of yelps, unmistakably dogs', burst out close by. No words will ever express what the barking of those dogs meant to us. Our spirits rose with a bound; we both felt that it more than probably meant all the difference between life and death. At a moment when our plight looked so hopeless that it would be impossible to exaggerate it we had found refuge. A few more yards, and, without warning, we came out into a village completely walled in by the jungle.

We could see, in the darkness, a number of Indians emerging from their huts. As they came close to us the doctor spoke to them in Spanish, which they appeared not to understand, and then successfully tried the Maya language. He at once asked for the headman, who stepped forward, and we alighted. As I had not been in the saddle for a very long time, it is more strictly accurate to say that I fell off.

The headman leading, we were conducted by the Indians, who appeared most friendly, to his shack. I was so sore and stiff I could hardly move.

It was a two-roomed structure made of split logs with a palm-leaf roof and dried mud floor. I had not been able to see the Indians properly in the dark, but on entering the bush-house, in the light of an oil lamp I saw that they were all of marked Maya type, of short and stocky stature, with long, coarse, blue-black hair, large broad heads, regular features, small hands and feet and well-rounded muscular limbs. These Indians, of whom there were about two hundred in the village, we subsequently learned

belonged to the Kekchi branch of the once great aboriginal Maya race.

The interstices in the log walls of our house freely admitted air—and also everything in the way of insects; while ominous rustlings in the palm-leaf roof suggested snakes and scorpions, which abound in all these thatched dwellings.

On entering the house of the headman we attempted to sit down on the rough wooden seats that were brought us; but I speedily found that owing to the friction of the saddle on the long ride a considerable portion of skin had been removed from an intimate part of my body. Finally, however, with much manœuvring, I managed to attain a sitting position (though I would have preferred to lie on my stomach) and, although worn out, we had a long talk with the chief and others of the Indians, from whom we learned that the rumours we had heard of a ruined city buried in the jungle were founded on actual fact. A branch of the river up which our attempt to travel had ended so disastrously a few days before ran close by; in fact the Indian huts were clustered on either side of it, and these people were living virtually in the shadow of what had once been a mighty city, the ruins being almost adjacent.

The Indians were most hospitable, and soon an immense meal was placed before us which we devoured ravenously. Afterwards, utterly exhausted, we slept. It was enough to make one curse when at daybreak we were aroused by the headman. I could have slept the clock round; but there he stood, stolidly, with four other Indians, all armed with axes which they obtain by trading and machetes, the cutlass-like weapons used for all purposes from felling bush to minor surgical operations. After a breakfast of tortillas (flat cakes of ground corn) and eggs, we set off at once with these guides to explore the ruins.

We walked about a mile along one of the curious tracks such as surround most Indian villages. These are tunnels

cut in the thick bush, just high enough to accommodate a five-foot Indian, but extremely fatiguing to a six-foot white who must either walk in a bent position or risk getting portions of his scalp torn off by the thousands of spikes in the leafy roof.

The Maya are usually very averse to having strangers visit their villages, and one may wander all day in a maze of tracks without finding their huts. The Santa Cruz, a northern branch of the tribe, even go so far as to cut out the tongues of their cocks to prevent them from crowing and thus betraying the situation of the village.

The trail soon descended a precipitous slope to the bank of a river which is a branch of the Rio Grande. This we crossed in a dug-out, though we could easily have waded the shallow water, and, climbing the steep incline on the other side, made our way through a "wameil" or old corn plantation where the heat, even at this early hour of the morning, was terrific, as the low secondary growth about six feet high was almost impenetrable and air could not enter. The sun beat down on our heads with immense force. After struggling through this, the machetes were brought into play, and yard by yard the Indians hacked a *picardo* (trail). Over an hour passed, and after our exertions in the sweltering heat we were forced to rest. By this time the sweat was pouring down us to such an extent that our shirts, breeches, and boots were sodden as if we had been wading through long wet grass. Shortly we began to hack our way again, when without warning we found ourselves facing a huge mass of stone. We could not see the top or sides, so dense was the tropical growth covering it; but the great limestone blocks in front of us told their own story. At a glance we knew it could not be a small isolated mound. Amply justified were the rumours we had heard; we stood on the threshold of a vast city—a mystery of the jungle.

Solemnly the doctor and I shook hands. The heat and

everything else was forgotten, and with energy we joined with the Indians in cutting *picardos* that we might explore the ruins further. After hours of work we realized that the terraced stone stairways were covered not only with jungle, but, to a considerable depth, with a layer of vegetal humus formed from decayed vegetation accumulated over many centuries. So dense was the forest growth that we could easily have passed within fifty yards of a building as large as St. Paul's cathedral and remained ignorant of its existence.

The most cursory examination showed us that the ruins were so vast that it would take months, possibly years, thoroughly to fell the jungle, dry it, and burn it, so as to learn the full extent of the city. But now, shrouded over as they were by the almost impenetrable bush, the ruins had an air of gloom which, while enhancing their mystery, greatly detracted from their impressiveness.

At about four o'clock the heat became so insufferable that we were compelled to strike work. As we returned, staggering, to the Indian village, we came again to the river. Here we stripped, and felt that we had indeed found Heaven as we lay in the cool water with the swift current pouring over our naked bodies which were swarming with ticks. Oh, the joy of that cold stream. Our sagging energies revived with every moment. Before we could lie comfortably we had to clear a space, for the rocky bottom was carpeted with "hooties," a species of fresh-water snail whose shell, sharp as needles, entered the untoughened soles of our feet as easily as would a tack turned point upwards. We made a remarkable discovery while lying in the water, and owe a personal debt of gratitude to a small species of fish which swarmed here. Almost immediately upon lying down we felt tiny nibbles and tickles all over us, and in the clear river we saw that numbers of little fish were actively nibbling off the ticks. Gratefully we allowed them to feast to their hearts' content, and in

about half an hour we were cleaned. I don't think there was a single tick left on us.

Indians, accompanied by their women and children, frequently passed up or down the river in their little dug-outs, and invariably stopped to admire our white skins. We hoped, at least, that the sentiment prompting their interest was one of admiration, but there seemed to be room for doubt. Their curiosity was entirely unmixed with any false modesty, for several ladies ultimately arrived, sat down on the opposite bank, and remained there watching us until we emerged.

Next morning, after an early breakfast of the eternal tortillas, we strolled through the village taking photographs, and stalked some of the native maidens, naked to the waist, expecting that like many Indian tribes they would be frightened of the camera. But we need not have taken the trouble we did, for on discovering us following them, instead of scuttling away they turned towards us, giving us every opportunity to photograph their splendid bronze young bodies. In all the Maya tribes Mongolian characteristics are clearly indicated. Their cheek-bones are too high and prominent and their mouths too wide for classic beauty; and once the attraction of youth disappears, as it does about the middle twenties, old age comes on with disastrous rapidity, leaving them, by the time they reach forty, withered, wrinkled and ungraceful, their breasts and bellies merging into one.

These Maya Kekchi are especially interesting, as they are direct descendants of the builders of the ruined city under whose shadow they now dwell, and of the many other mysterious buried cities of Central America.

They use a dialect of the Maya, differing little from the original language spoken by their progenitors thousands of years ago

CHAPTER VII

THE RUINS ARE IMMENSE—INDIAN STORIES—HOW WE CROSSED THE RAPIDS

WE had managed to get a number of Indians to continue the work of clearing the bush that day, and on reaching the ruins next morning we found that good progress had been made. Leaving them at work we set off in another direction, taking more Indians with us, armed with machetes to cut a path through the thick undergrowth which, as it stood, was quite impenetrable. Passing several large, stone-faced, pyramidal structures we crossed what had evidently at one time been a cement road, now covered with humus, beneath which large fragments of cement were still to be found together with the limestone and rubble of which it had been made, and descended a stone-faced, terraced walk to a flat courtyard, where lay a curious stone—apparently an altar. Exploring further we found wild cotton, Santa Maria, cohune palm and other great forest trees, draped in hanging ropes of liana—trees and liana alike covered in masses of orchids and flowering airplants, beneath which the smell of decaying vegetation in the close, steamy atmosphere, and the extraordinary fecundity of insect life, rendered cutting a track through the forest no pleasant task.

Unexpectedly we came upon a great stone stairway, though not until we were actually against it and had cut down a section of the bush did we realize it was anything but a natural mound. It was completely buried in humus and covered with thick undergrowth. The stones of which this was composed were enormous, and the labour involved

in moving the limestone blocks for a massive structure such as this and then erecting them baffles imagination. On either side the steps were flanked by a sloping wall of beautifully cut stones. This must undoubtedly have been a processional stairway, as it led to the summit of a pyramid which was quite flat.

In climbing this pyramid we nearly came to grief, for ascending the steep side facing the valley was very much like scaling the side of a house. Every crevice and crack between the stones had to be taken advantage of as a hold for fingers and toes. One of the Indians ahead and above us accidentally dislodged a huge block of limestone, which whizzed within inches of our heads, striking with a grinding crash on the solid masonry below, and then rumbling on into the valley which lay beneath us. Had it touched either of us we should have been swept from the precipitous side and dashed to certain death. Never again did we climb one behind the other.

Great care had also to be exercised on account of the snakes which make their homes in the holes and cracks between the stones. It was a decidedly unpleasant sensation to reflect that one might at any moment feel the fangs of a poisonous reptile strike deep into the flesh on placing one's hand in what looked like a convenient crevice for the purpose of pulling upwards.

By the end of that day it was quite definite that we had discovered a buried city of immense size; of its extent we of course had no knowledge. On our return to the village that night the natives, who were still extremely friendly, had prepared a wonderful banquet for us, consisting of a chicken stew followed by a chicken roasted whole, but so small and emaciated that we could comfortably have eaten two apiece. Of the stew we were very suspicious. And with good reason; for on examining the calabash later we discovered a snake's vertebral bone lying at the bottom.

While we were reclining in our hammocks after feeding,

one of our labourers, an elderly, taciturn Indian, entered; and seating himself without greeting (as is the usual custom), remained stolidly silent for half an hour. Our patience exhausted first, Dr. Gann asked him what he wanted. He replied, "Nothing," but produced a polished jadeite bead which he presented to us; and on being questioned as to where it came from, shook his head blankly. Subsequently, however, he told us the following curious story.

Many years ago, his father-in-law, who had a corn plantation near the ruins, slept one night in the bush within the city limits, where he was visited by a very strange and vivid dream. He dreamed that he saw the bush cleared, the pyramids restored and supporting great buildings on their summits, while along the streets between them passed endless processions of men and women in long white garments. These were accompanied by others playing flutes, drums, and cymbals; and he asserted that he distinctly heard the sound of the instruments as the people in the procession sang a wild chant. This scene gradually faded away, giving place to one representing the interior of a limestone cave, where, standing in rows on shelves cut into the rock, were a number of life-sized, grotesque human faces and masks painted in various colours. He seemed to see the location of this cave as quite close to where he was felling the bush to plant corn.

On waking in the morning, being highly superstitious, he was very much scared, and nothing would induce him ever to sleep at the ruins again. The curious part of the story is that a few days later he did actually come across the entrance to a limestone cave, within which he found a number of life-sized human masks, and faces of grotesque appearance well modelled in pottery and painted in a variety of colours. On his wife's advice he determined to leave them alone, as otherwise it was probable he would be bewitched by the gods of his ancestors. He was not to get

rid of them so easily, however, for that night he dreamed that if these idols were not removed the most dreadful misfortunes would befall him and his family. This placed him in a very awkward predicament. Though warned not to leave them in the cave, no indication had been vouchsafed as to their actual disposal. He solved the question by burying them in the floor of his hut, which latter he promptly deserted. This appeared to have been the correct procedure, as he was never troubled with the matter again in dreams or otherwise.

The old man's wife and daughter and daughter's husband (the narrator) had all seen the idols, and knew, of course, where they were buried; and the last-named suggested he should accompany us to the place, and that we should unearth them and remove them for ever. This we intended to do, but something always occurred to prevent it, and I should say that the whole of this story was an hallucination. The Maya, like most primitive people, continually have visions and dreams of a vivid nature, and some kink in their brains twists unreality into reality.

It almost seems to me that many of the Indian tribes among whom I have lived lie down with the deliberate intention of dreaming, and are capable of compelling dreams; though I must confess I have yet to understand why they should take such pleasure, which is really a morbid one, in this dreaming business of theirs. For seldom does one hear of anything good or cheerful arising from their nocturnal pastime; the dreams always seem to portray warnings, horrors to come, death, or disaster in some form or other.

After living with the Maya Kekchi for some days, from what we saw and were told we came to the conclusion that the ruins extended from this branch of the Rio Grande to the main river, a distance of some miles, and that their area was no less than six square miles—probably considerably more.

We had passed through so much that we had practically reached the limit of our physical endurance; our bodies were covered with septic sores, and our energy was at a very low ebb, while, owing to the winged and other tortures of the night, sleep had been virtually impossible. The village was infested with scorpions; we even found them creeping on our hammocks, and it was a common thing to see them crawling up the sides of the hut and along the floor. We were fortunate to escape being stung.

I shall always remember our last day there. Arriving back at the village, tired out from our work at the ruins, we were met with the news that our horses, while being led to the water to drink, had slipped their halters and bolted. In this part of the world the homing instinct of these animals is fully developed, and we knew they would eventually reach Punta Gorda, but their loss left us in an unenviable position. We were completely stranded—personally I would have lived there for ever rather than walk back over the damnable trail we had ridden—unless we could get Indians to convey us down the river in one of their dug-outs. This, thank goodness, we finally succeeded in doing, and started off at daybreak next morning.

It is doubtful whether the exotic scenery of the river here can be excelled in any part of the world. For the first two or three miles the stream, which runs winding and twisting at about three knots an hour, took us down, aided by the paddles of the Indians, in perfect comfort; then, rounding a sharp bend, we saw ahead of us a long stretch of foaming water. The skill with which the natives negotiated these cascading rapids was incredible; black boulders protruded from the surface, and others, even more treacherous, lay just submerged; yet we threaded them without once touching. Had we done so, it is certain we should have immediately capsized. At the end of the tumbling waters the river entered an archway of greenery

where huge trees had fallen completely across from one side to the other, covered with masses of flowering vines and airplants. Leaving this behind we ran into rapid after rapid, travelling down in places at a speed of over ten knots. Shortly a low booming broke on our ears and we knew we must be approaching something much more formidable.

Suddenly the river entered a tunnel made by the forest completely meeting overhead at a height of not more than ten feet from the water. So dense was the foliage that not a single ray of sunlight could penetrate, and we were enshrouded in a ghostly virescent light, while a sepulchral chill crept over us. The booming grew louder, the tunnel and river broadened; then right ahead we saw a roaring waterfall. To shoot this would have been impossible, so we drew into the bank and stepped out into shallow water. Tying a rope to one end of our dug-out, an Indian hung on to this with all his might, the rest of us guiding the boat over the fall and steering it carefully through the rapids beyond, past the enormous boulders that reared their black heads above the torrent, until once more we reached calm water.

All that day we travelled, and reached the mouth of the river at night, to arrive finally at Punta Gorda with the news of our discovery.

That night as we related our story to Lady Brown and Mr. Tuke, by the self-satisfied smiles on their faces we soon became aware that they also had a tale to impart. Determined not to be left doing nothing, during our absence the spirit of emulation had seized them, and they became possessed of a wonderful idea. They would leave in the schooner, travel down the coast past the Guatemalan border and proceed to the Rio Dulce which flows out into the Caribbean Sea close to the frontier of British Honduras. At its mouth is the quaint Guatemalan town of Livingston. To think was to act ; and all went well until they dropped

anchor off Livingston, where from the shore a launch immediately put off flying the flag of the country, and carrying the commandante, port captain, customs officers, doctor, and other government officials. They climbed on board the schooner, apparently very much annoyed.

"Why have you not hoisted the Guatemalan flag?"

Lady Brown and Mr. Tuke looked blankly at one another. The coloured captain nervously mentioned that the schooner was not carrying the required flag.

"Where are your papers?" demanded the officials.

Again a helpless look passed between Lady Brown, Mr. Tuke, and the captain. Such a thing as papers had never entered their minds.

"Show your passports," ordered the commandante.

These they had, but unfortunately without a visa for Guatemala.

The sequel is amusing, and I often wonder whether in Great Britain or the United States of America the same courtesy would have been extended. The officials gauged the position exactly. They were not hide-bound and tied by the rigid red tape one has to contend with in many other countries; and also they had a sense of humour. They were tickled to death to think that unsuspectingly and without guile, giving no thought to such things as papers, flags, passports, etc., this lady and most amiable gentleman had turned up in their port with the sole purpose of visiting their town and enjoying the beauties of their river. Never should it be said that the dignitaries of Livingston were wanting in courtesy. Instead of legal proceedings, heavy fines, and the seizing of the schooner, the officials raised their hats. They were charmed to receive the illustrious señor and señora, who, escorted by the commandante and his friends, were taken ashore and made free of the town, and ultimately given assistance which enabled them to travel some considerable distance up the Rio Dulce and enjoy its wonders.

CHAPTER VIII

THE COMEDY OF THE KETTLE—WE SAIL FOR ENGLAND—
FULLY EQUIPPED WE RETURN TO THE SPANISH MAIN

It is the courtesy one always experiences in the Central American Republics that has so endeared them to me. But in spite of this, a very different experience befell Lady Brown and Mr. Tuke on the night they left Livingston.

The coloured crew who had also, on the authority of the commandante, been granted permission to go ashore, returned on board in a thoroughly drunken condition. The captain, a decent fellow, had remained on the boat, probably with suspicions, born from experience, of what would happen. Lady Brown and Mr. Tuke were asleep when the trouble commenced. It was practically mutiny. Several members of the crew, inflamed with drink, began to threaten the captain; their language was disgusting and they were rapidly getting out of hand when, realizing that only drastic measures would quell them, he seized a heavy log of wood at the moment when the ringleader, a huge brute over six feet tall, rushed at him. Without hesitation the captain brought it down with all his force on the ruffian's head, splitting it open and felling him to the deck, showing them who was master. Before they had time to think he rushed at the rest and drove them pell-mell along the boat to the bow. Here they crouched while he stood over them, his crude but effective weapon held menacingly aloft ready for any emergency, while he cursed them violently in the language of the cays, at which he was an adept. When they were thoroughly cowed he

ordered them to the stern, where the man he had struck lay unconscious, and commanded them to pick him up. The roaring lions had changed to bleating lambs and they obeyed.

"Carry him to the hatch," he shouted. "Now drop the bloody swine in the hold!" And with a thud the wretched drunk disappeared into the depths. So ended the mutiny.

The heads of these natives are so tough that the next morning the wounded man was up and about, and except for a swelling and a long cut appeared to be suffering no great discomfort. It was only the fact that the captain of the schooner was a man who would stop at nothing once the devil was roused in him that saved Lady Brown and Mr. Tuke from having a very different story to tell, if they ever returned to Punta Gorda to tell it—accidents so easily happen in that part of the world.

We rested for a few days here before leaving for Belize, and thoroughly enjoyed staying in the quaint little place. The people seemed to be in the last stages of indolence, and the only thing which appeared to flourish was the breeding of children. With hardly an exception the female population were in various stages of propagation.

It seemed strange to find one or two white men here, such as the district commissioner and medical officer. White people in a primitive, tropical setting, with its riot of colour and coloured population, to me look anæmic, unreal, out of place.

We learned some rather amusing things. One was the way in which the natives distort telegrams. Here is an example. A case of detonators had been despatched for use in connection with dynamiting the road, and the man to whom it was sent was mystified on receiving a telegram to the effect that a case of tomatoes was arriving. Another telegram which referred to a consignment of soap to Guatemala was replied to as follows: "Regret cannot give

you any information about the Pope, but Father Tenk " (the local priest) " left this morning on mail-boat." It so happened that the man who received this message was an agnostic; and enraged, he refused to have the telegram charged to him.

Another message was received from the Postmaster in Belize which read, " Please send back all socks " (sacks) " at once to head-quarters."

But a most ludicrous incident on which a play might well be written under the title " The Idiosyncrasies of a Kettle " took place here.

The Acting Medical Officer at Punta Gorda reported to the Principal Medical Officer at Belize that the enamel tea-kettle in use at the hospital had sprung a leak. The P.M.O. sent this report on to the Colonial Secretary for instructions as to what he wished done in the matter. The Colonial Secretary forwarded the notification to the Director of Public Works asking if it would be best to supply a new kettle, or whether it would be worth while to have the old one repaired. The Director of Public Works minuted it back to the Colonial Secretary, suggesting that the P.M.O. be asked to request the A.M.O. at Punta Gorda to send the kettle to Belize forthwith for his inspection. The Colonial Secretary minuted the request to the P.M.O., and suggested he carry out the instructions of the Director of Public Works. Accordingly the kettle was sent to Belize, and the Director of Public Works, after a consultation, decided it would be cheaper to repair it. In the meantime the A.M.O. at Punta Gorda asked for authority to purchase a kettle locally, as the hospital was without one. Days elapsed, as this request had to pass through the P.M.O., Colonial Secretary, and Director of Public Works, whereupon it was minuted to the blacksmith to see if he could without delay repair the kettle in dispute. The blacksmith replied that he could, so the kettle was sent to him for " necessary repairs."

In due course the work was finished, whereupon the Director of Public Works reported to the P.M.O. that the kettle in question had been sent to Punta Gorda in good and sound condition. The A.M.O. at Punta Gorda, on the arrival of the kettle, reported by telegram that in transit its spout had been knocked off, and asked for instructions. After interminable delay fresh orders were issued that the A.M.O. might purchase a kettle locally. Meanwhile the hospital had been without one for three months.

I was sorry when we embarked on the schooner and set sail for Belize. On arriving we had a long interview with the Governor, Sir Eyre Hutson, and gave him a full report of our discovery. We also cabled to England and notified the British Museum. The upshot of this was that a meeting of the Legislative Council was called in Belize, and a week later an exclusive concession was granted to Lady Richmond Brown, Dr. Gann, and myself, giving us the exclusive right for twenty years to excavate not only the ruined city we had found but also an area of seventy square miles adjoining.

Although naturally elated, our satisfaction was marred by the illness of Mr. Tuke. Shortly after the experience up the Rio Grande when the dug-out capsized and our stores were lost, owing to the privations he had endured on that terrible night my dear friend contracted malarious dysentery, and steadily grew worse until at last he was dangerously ill. Taking advantage of a boat calling at Belize, and doing all we could for his comfort, we got him on board, though he could hardly walk. He reached England safely; but it is with sorrow I have to record that he never fully recovered, and a year or two afterwards one of the best sportsmen that ever lived embarked on the great adventure, mourned by us all.

We sailed for England a few weeks later, and after conferring with certain scientists and the British Museum we agreed to return again to British Honduras and

commence the work of thoroughly investigating the ruined city. But as this has been dealt with so fully and lucidly by Dr. Thomas Gann in his remarkable book *Mystery Cities*, I shall only touch on the archæological discoveries and the scientific deductions we came to during our work there. I would commend this book, *Mystery Cities*, to all who are interested; in it the seeker for knowledge regarding the Maya civilization will be amply rewarded.

On our return to British Honduras, with the experience we had gained on our previous expedition we carried with us from England a considerable equipment, not the least of which was a very comprehensive medicine chest most generously presented by Messrs. Burroughs & Welcome. But our most ambitious scheme was to transport our little twenty-ton yacht, *Cara*, out to British Honduras. It was this same motor-yacht that Lady Brown and I had used as a base in our exploration work in the San Blas Archipelago and the Chucunaque country in the Darien of Panama, the history of which has been written.¹

The difficulties in moving this boat from Falmouth Harbour to Central America would alone make a story. Our coloured engineer, Robbie, was still with us, and vowed he could sail the yacht safely from Falmouth round Land's End and up the coast to Liverpool, which was to be our port of embarkation. We had our misgivings, but he was so certain of the seaworthiness of his beloved boat that we let him have his way.

Taking a pilot on board he started, and all went well until they encountered one of the frequent south-westerly Atlantic gales. Mountainous seas broke on board, the little dinghy was carried completely away, and finally, when off Fishguard, the steering-gear was smashed. It speaks volumes for the builder of the yacht and the seamanship of Robbie and the pilot that they ever made Fishguard

¹ *Unknown Tribes, Uncharted Seas*, by Lady Richmond Brown. *Battles with Giant Fish*, by F. A. Mitchell-Hedges.

Harbour; but they limped in, cold, drenched to the skin and hungry. (They had had no time to eat in the gale, and to light the oil-stove was an impossibility.) But nothing daunted, after a few necessary repairs had been completed there, they continued north towards Liverpool and triumphantly sailed up the Mersey.

Fearless devils, both of them, and yet in Robbie's case it is rather strange. No matter how big a gale or how great the seas we have met in that little boat, I have never seen him turn a hair. In fact on one occasion when it seemed that nothing could save us, he was quite cheerful. Yet if he saw a snake twenty yards away he would become almost beside himself with terror, and he would run like a crazy man from a scorpion.

Many people are like this. I have seen Lady Brown face the greatest danger without the flicker of an eyelid; I have seen her on the brink of death and she has never flinched; but, ye gods! let her see a rat—exit Lady Brown. There is no accounting for such aberrations.

We arrived at Liverpool to be met by a very bucked Robbie and an equally proud pilot; and together with a small crowd of press photographers and cinema-men we gathered down at the river to watch the yacht being hoisted from the water. We felt rather anxious as she was swung into the air, then slowly rose until her keel was clear of the deck of the steamship in which we were to travel to British Honduras. With great care she was lowered to the deck and lashed in a position so that no matter what storms we might meet or how violent the motion of the boat, nothing could move her.

We intended not only to travel to the ruined city we had found and begin excavation work there, but had made arrangements to journey through the interior of Guatemala, San Salvador, Nicaragua, and on to Panama. Our voyage across the Atlantic was slow and uneventful; we met bad weather nearly all the way, and were glad when

early one morning we sighted the coco-nut palms on the islands near the coast of British Honduras. Without mishap, after the ship had dropped anchor a mile out from Belize, the yacht was again hoisted from the deck, swung out, and floated safely on the waters of the Caribbean.

CHAPTER IX

TREE LICE AND CHIGGERS—OUR BUSH-HOUSE IN THE JUNGLE—CUTHBERT

WE wasted no time in Belize, but, loading up with the further equipment and stores which we knew would be necessary, ran down to Punta Gorda on the *Cara*. Dr. Gann, who unfortunately was suffering from phlebitis, hoped to follow us within the next few days. We had a rather dirty passage, striking the tail-end of a norther, and on arriving at Punta Gorda we left at once for the mouth of the Rio Grande. We determined if possible to navigate the yacht across the bar. Beyond was deep water, and we knew from previous experience that once she had threaded the sandbar and the tree-trunks with which it was strewn there would be no trouble in running up for at least twenty miles, after which it would be impossible owing to snags, shallows and rapids. Arriving off the bar, we anchored, and Robbie and a native in the yacht's dinghy staked the deepest channel they could find. When they returned on board we started the engine and risked it. Just as we were crossing the shallowest part we felt the boat, which naturally was travelling very slowly, strike a submerged log and slither completely over it. But the venture proved successful, all was now plain sailing, and that night we moored at the place we had made our objective—twenty miles up from the sea.

Our main purpose in going to Punta Gorda on the way had been to send runners up-country to tell the Indians to come down in their dug-outs to meet us, as, when we left them the year before, they had promised to do. And

in the matter of promises I have found Indians more reliable than many white men.

We had to wait on the yacht only two days before they arrived, and without delay we transferred all our camping equipment and stores to their dug-outs and began the last and most hazardous part of our journey up the Rio Grande.

It would be impossible for any but Indians to negotiate this river. The seemingly impracticable feats they accomplished with paddle and pole were a revelation; and it was an alarming experience to watch them working the dug-outs over the falls. Here, of course, we had to get out. Many times we held our breath; it seemed to us that the dug-outs with all our impedimenta were seriously endangered; but the natives treated everything casually—hauling boats over waterfalls, missing projecting rocks by inches and threading foaming rapids were obviously everyday occurrences to them.

But without misadventure late on the second day our dug-outs were moored to the bank close to the Indian village and the ruins. When I say "without misadventure" I mean to the dug-outs. On the way up the river we had to spend a night in the jungle, and like an idiot I rested with my back against an ancient tree-stump, a metropolis of tree-lice as I discovered to my cost. Disturbed, the loathsome insects swarmed inside my shirt and breeches, playing Old Harry with my body; and the next morning I was smothered in a red rash, the result of their onslaught, and looked as though I had a severe attack of measles. These tree-lice are the most marvellous tunnel-makers in the world; they never travel in the open but along the ground, and up the trunks of the tallest trees they construct tubes through which they make their way. In an incredibly short space of time they burrow through wood, leather, and in fact almost anything. In a night they went through the stout wooden lid and sides of our medicine-chest and also the leather case of one of the

cameras, riddling both with holes. They are nauseating creatures—yellowish-white in colour—and look like a cross between a louse and an ant. They swarm in the Central American Republics, and in a lesser degree in many of the West Indian islands, and are a plague to buildings and all furniture therein. Nothing is safe from their attack.

When we were still a mile from the village of the Maya Kekchi Indians, the man who appeared to be the headman of our natives blew several loud blasts on a conchshell horn he carried. This signal that we were approaching was evidently heard in the village. Rounding a bend we saw many of the Indians had come down to the banks of the river to meet us. I recognized quite a number of them, and they seemed genuinely pleased to see us. A practical demonstration of this was that they had done their best to clean out an old unoccupied bush-house which stood directly on the track leading to the ruins.

In this hut we took up our quarters. It was decidedly filthy, for there is no doubt the earth-floor of it had for generations been the abiding place for all the refuse imaginable. An Indian never troubles to go outside when he desires to expectorate, as the men, women and children do continually. Many are tubercular, coughing and spitting day and night. The remains of the cooking-pot are always flung indiscriminately on the ground and in course of time become an actual part of the floor.

Naturally this old bush-house was literally alive when we entered into possession. Never have I found more scorpions in any one place. They were an absolute curse, and some of them were the largest I have ever seen. Several varieties were represented, and it is a miracle that we were not badly stung; but by carefully shaking out our boots every morning, and our other articles of attire—including our hats—we managed to escape.

Enormous tarantula spiders were also numerous, while the dust and dirt of the earth floor made an excellent bed

for chiggers, from which, in a greater or lesser degree, we all suffered. I have met people who say they like to have chiggers, because they cause a pleasant tickling sensation in the toes. My opinion is that such people must be *non compos mentis*, since this wretched tropical flea (for that is what it really is) burrows in most cases under the nail of the toe, where she proceeds in a regular and orthodox manner to the rearing of her family, first depositing a bag of eggs. This is all very well; but if the eggs are left until they hatch out serious trouble may result—in fact septic poisoning is a probability, entailing the loss of a limb and, in extreme cases, one's life. By exercising care, however, the creature can be removed by the following method: the point of a needle must be worked in a circle round the black spot which will be seen with a whitish mark around it, until the epidermis is penetrated, when with care the circular piece of skin, together with mother and her bag of eggs, can be removed intact. If this is done properly, it should leave a clean round hole in the toe about the size of a pea. It is advisable always to apply iodine or some similar strong disinfectant afterwards.

A few days after we had arrived the poor old doctor turned up; he had pledged his word he would and I am sure only death would have prevented him. We were sorry to see that he was in such bad shape; and the trouble in one of his legs made it impossible for him to walk; so, in dignified state, he was carried by Indians in a hammock. He turned up his nose when he saw our domicile, declaring he would have one of his own erected actually on a courtyard of the ruins. And as nothing would induce him to spend the night in our jungle Ritz he passed on with his acolytes down the trail, and when we visited him a few hours later we found the building of his mansion was well advanced, and he appeared to be quite at home in company with his faithful henchman whom I never heard called anything but "Muddy."

The Indians, chiefly the women, had the most dreadful sores on their limbs; many of the ulcers were as large as the palm of the hand, the flesh being eaten away, particularly on their arms and legs, almost to the bone. These horrible running sores were quite exposed and were surrounded by clusters of small flies.

Emulating the doctor who was, for the time, completely *hors de combat* with phlebitis, I proceeded to make a beastly nuisance of myself by contracting a disease. Whether it was by direct infection from the Indians, or the bites of flies which carried the poison after feeding on their sores, I don't know, but several sores broke out on my legs so that I was unable to walk. The whole of the work now devolved on Lady Brown; she had to nurse both the doctor and me, see to our food, and at the same time watch the Indians that we had conscripted to fell the jungle and clear the ruins—an unrecorded chapter and a remarkable achievement.

Gann was the first to hobble about with the aid of a stick. It took over a fortnight for my own wretched sores to heal.

We had been up at the ruins for about a month when we had a strange visitor. We were surprised one morning to see gazing fixedly at us from the doorway with a puzzled expression upon its face, an agouti. This queer little animal is a sort of cross between a rabbit and a rat, with very long hind legs which enable him to lope along at a tremendous rate. We threw him some food, whereupon he bolted, but the next morning at exactly the same time he reappeared. After a week or two he became so tame that every morning and again in the evening he would fearlessly enter the bush-house and immediately start making a curious little squeaking noise, actually begging to be fed. We used to gather cohune nuts, smash them, and feed him with the kernels, laughing at the comical way in which he would sit up with one of the nuts in his forepaws, and with

great relish devour it in front of us. Finally he was so friendly that he would allow us to pick him up, fondle and feed him while he sat on our laps. We christened him "Cuthbert," and used to look forward to his visits. But alas—one morning Cuthbert did not arrive, and at night there was still no sign of our little friend. We were much disturbed, wondering whether he had fallen a victim to one of the jaguars of which there were a number in the vicinity. Two or three days later Lady Brown and I went down to bathe in the river after a hard day's work at the ruins; and whilst lying in the water close to the bank she suddenly exclaimed, "I can hear Cuthbert."

I listened intently for some time, and then sure enough, I distinctly caught the curious little squeak of our friend.

"I'm hanged if you're not right," I said. "Come, let's see if we can find him."

We searched the banks unsuccessfully, and then began making a tiny squeaking sound ourselves, when suddenly close to us again we heard him. We continued our squeaking efforts, and quite near came the reply—but not a sign of him could we see.

"It's ridiculous," Lady Brown said. "He must be here somewhere." At the same moment we saw a hole in the bank almost obscured by maiden-hair fern. We moved the greenery aside—and there was Cuthbert. Out came his funny head still squeaking plaintively, while his furry body vibrated with pleasure. I picked the poor little chap up and stroked him, both of us wondering why he had gone so thin. Then Lady Brown had an inspiration. She put her hand deep in the hole, and exclaimed,

"Midge, there's something alive in here. Heavens—Cuthbert's got a family."

"Well I'm damned! Let's have a look." Sure enough our friend Cuthbert had turned out to be a naughty girl, and seemed immensely proud of the fact.

For some days following this we regularly took a supply of nuts to the hole in the bank, until ultimately our little friend rejoined us in our bush-house.

Day by day we laboured at the work of clearing and excavating. We had by now enlisted practically all the male Indians in the village, who every morning were appointed to their various tasks, of which the most important was to continue to fell the jungle covering the ruins.

It always made me sad to see a great tree cut down. I remember one in particular that dominated the jungle; after four men had wielded their axes for over an hour there was an ominous cracking; a shrill call echoing through the forest broke from the axemen, and two hundred and fifty feet up against the skyline the topmost branches of the monarch of the forest began to shiver. Then very slowly it moved earthwards, loud reports breaking from the trunk as it fell, gathering speed and force on its way. A rushing roar filled the air as the towering giant crashed through and levelled the smaller trees in its path; the impact as it thundered to earth made the ground tremble, and a vast cloud of leaves was shot upwards like a swarm of butterflies by the displacement of air. Then again the loud call from the Indians rang through the jungle, and the thought arose—"What a vandal is man!" But it had to be done, though I should have liked to save that tree with its masses of liana and vine trailing from its crest to the ground.

For several weeks we left the cut underbrush, palms, immense trees and a conglomeration of smaller ones, to dry, until the day arrived for the great burning.

CHAPTER X

THE HOLOCAUST—A MOUND OF SCORPIONS—OUR INFESTED SHACK

ON the day our preparations were complete for firing the whole of this mass, Lady Brown, Dr. Gann, and I decided to watch from one of the terraces in the ruins on which Dr. Gann's bush-house, palm-thatched kitchen, and shelters for the Indians had been erected. The men had all assembled. Five-gallon kerosene tins filled with water had been carried up from the river and placed in readiness, while on the top of the doctor's shacks Indians were stationed so that if the thatch should catch fire it could be extinguished before spreading. We thought we had taken ample precautions against any emergency, yet——.

Dried torches were prepared, and at ten o'clock, in brilliant sunshine, Lady Brown, our pyromaniac, started the blaze. From this the Indians lit their torches; they were in their element, and off they ran with wild whoops, firing the felled jungle at fifty different points. Very shortly spirals of smoke were rising all around followed by bursts of flame. In a few minutes a low murmur could be heard gradually increasing in volume; obscuring the sky, immense clouds of black smoke billowed upwards through which the sun like a great crimson ball appeared irregularly. The murmur changed to a crackling roar. Hundreds of feet aloft shot burning leaves and ash driven up by the terrific blast of super-heated air. We had thought the terrace where we were standing would be quite safe, but now the blinding smoke, heat and sparks became so intolerable that we found breathing impossible except

through cloth soaked in water, and every piece of material available (including my khaki shirt which I stripped off) was brought into service. Dr. Gann looked anxious—and I felt it.

“What do you think about it?” Lady Brown gasped.

“Don’t worry—we’re all right,” I lied cheerfully, knowing all the time that we had badly under-estimated the distance the immense sheets of flame would travel. To attempt to move away was out of the question—we were completely ringed round by a raging furnace in which nothing could have lived for seconds. But the magnificence of the frightening sight detracted from the extreme discomfort we were suffering.

In the centre of the ruins stood a gigantic tree with masses of liana and creeper falling to the ground from its topmost branches. Owing to its great size we had left it standing. The rolling sea of flame reached it, and with a sound like quick-firing guns, from root to summit—over two hundred and fifty feet into the air—it became enveloped, and within a few minutes nothing but the smoking skeleton remained.

By now the noise was deafening—a thunderous booming roar in which we could not hear ourselves speak except by shouting into one another’s ears. It was a grand and awful sight—three insignificant specimens of humanity standing on an islet ringed round by a raging inferno which, as it billowed onwards, left the ground glowing hot. The rapidity with which the holocaust swept on its way, devastating everything before it, was extraordinary. One moment a small hill would be seen, covered in a tangled mass of branches, vines, and small trees—the next, it was gone, and in its place would stand a smouldering incandescent pyramid, the existence of which we had never suspected. Wall, terrace, and mound after mound were rapidly exposed—we were amazed at the immensity of the ruins now being unfolded as we watched. From the time

the first light was applied but six hours elapsed before only bare earth remained, covered with smoking and red-hot debris. We had left a few dead trees standing, as it is much more difficult to cut through the hard wood of a dead tree than through one with life in it. And every now and again one of these would totter and fall with a crash, while showers of sparks and dust shot upwards. And now the pyramids with the roadway, courtyards, and terraces of the main citadel showed indistinctly through a veil of bluish smoke. We were left gasping, our skins parched and our eyes red and bloodshot.

Although we were eager to examine the main structure, it was of course impossible at the moment, as the whole had been converted into a huge oven which would have roasted a herd of oxen. Heavy rain fell in the late afternoon and during the night, and the next morning the ruins had cooled down sufficiently for us to investigate them. We discovered there were many courtyards, terraces, and low pyramids which had previously been totally obscured, and we could now see that the citadel rose compactly almost sheer from two streams which bounded it on the east and west, while some hundreds of small burial mounds all grouped together were exposed. Before us lay a ruined city far exceeding our most sanguine expectations.

Although it is known that Cortes passed within a few miles of the place, there is little doubt that this city remained undiscovered by him. Buried for many centuries in the dense jungle, it now for the first time lay fully exposed.

Some distance from the ruins were two isolated mounds that had escaped the fire, and these we commenced to excavate. But no sooner had we started work than an unexpected and unwanted development took place. As each stone of any size was removed scorpions darted out; black females with innumerable little ones, red males with yellow legs, scaly ones, others bluish in colour. It was

literally a mound of scorpions. The place was alive with the poisonous creatures. Heaven knows why they had congregated here, unless it was one of their pet breeding-grounds. The expected happened; one of the Indians was stung, and his rage knew no bounds; doubtless in his own particular language he was cursing horribly as he danced round. It acted as a spur to the others; to a man they were seized with the spirit of the chase, and a hunt of extermination began. The Indians became highly excited, their curious whoops ringing out over the jungle as each fresh kill was registered. We had the greatest difficulty in stopping them—they are born hunters and were enjoying themselves hugely—but we were anxious to get on with the excavations. The poor blighter who had been stung I am afraid received scant sympathy; but strange to say he appeared to suffer very little inconvenience except a severe swelling of the hand. We finally got them together and started digging in the second mound.

Here also we found excitement, for very shortly two enormous female tarantula spiders made their appearance, each cuddling a leathery egg as large as a golf ball. Enraged, they defended their eggs to the utmost, their furry bodies bristling with fury as they savagely repelled all our efforts to capture them. It was remarkable the way these two great spiders fought for their young. After much stratagem and manœuvring they were ultimately trapped and forced into a large-necked killing-bottle to be preserved with their eggs. Not one scorpion was found in this mound; the reason was obvious—the tarantulas had seen to that.

As the dry season advanced the heat became almost insufferable. The midday reading of the thermometer in the shade of the bush-house was over a hundred; in the low underbush it ran up to a hundred and ten, while in the ruins amidst the pyramids the stones were so hot that when unthinkingly (as frequently happened) we sat on

them, our performance in leaping up would have done credit to an athletic high jump. A heavy rain would have been a godsend; every day there was the same blazing sun in the brassy sky, ground and foliage were scorched, and what breeze there was came in hot blasts and brought no relief. Both the small streams where we had obtained our best water had dried up long ago, and the river was getting into a filthy condition. It had become very shallow, and was saturated with vegetable matter. Every drop of water for drinking had to be boiled and strained, and even then, judging by the residue, one could almost say it was food as well as drink. Owing to the parched condition of the ground and jungle, lizards, snakes, and, in fact, a regular zoo crept down in the hot afternoons to the edge of the river to drink. Whether it was owing to the intense heat and lack of moisture I cannot tell, but our bush-house, in spite of our eternal warfare against crawling and creeping things, became more infested than ever. At night it was invaded by praying-mantis, some of them six and seven inches long, enormous beetles resembling nothing so much as rhinoceres in miniature, and a host of other creatures. Scarcely an evening was devoid of excitement. There was always something fresh, and anticipation as to what might come next certainly prevented boredom.

Frequently large mottled spiders, measuring three inches across, fell with a "plomp" from the palm-thatched roof, each one clutching a large moth from which it would obstinately refuse to be parted.

Our coloured man, Robbie, who had refused to be left behind on the yacht, occupied the position of general handyman, and one night we had a regular scorpion hunt. It started with Robbie lifting up a tin of coffee on the back of which was a large black scorpion. He let out a yell, dropped the tin, cleared at one bound a camp-bed and packing-case, and shot out of the door. The cause of this upheaval was soon despatched with an axe-handle to

its especial Valhalla. We didn't care a button about Robbie or the scorpion; but what worried us was that when he had dropped the tin the lid had come off and the contents scattered over the earth floor. Lady Brown having in a few well-chosen words expressed herself on the subject we proceeded to scrape up the coffee, plus an accumulation of dirt, and replace it in the tin. We had scarcely settled down again when across the floor ran another scorpion. Just as it had almost reached Lady Brown's ankles a howl from Robbie brought us to our feet. God—how that man could yell! I have heard many people shriek, shout, and bellow, but for a real, wholesome, full-blown yell commend me to a West Indian coloured man. The well-directed heel of a boot was most efficacious in finishing the career of trouble number two.

Within the next five minutes we all watched a most interesting sight. Slowly down from the roof crept an enormous scorpion, its long, thin, black tail with the curved poisonous sting curled over its back. A large cockroach, unsuspecting of its approaching doom, was just below. Stealthily, inch by inch, the stalking death crept nearer; with a lightning movement the scorpion then seized the cockroach in its claws, savagely tore the luckless creature's head from its body, and proceeded to feed on the fat, juicy insect. But its meal was interrupted by the axe-handle which came into play again. The scorpion fell outside the shack and Lady Brown, going out with a spot-light to make sure it was dead, called loudly. We ran out, and right at her feet was a large tarantula. This "went west" into the cyanide bottle.

Scorpions continued to make their appearance until at last Robbie could stand it no longer, and with the expression "This place no good—can't live in it decent one time!" cleared out of the shack to his own quarters. We settled down to sleep, but had hardly closed our eyes when frightful shrieks, followed by a thud, issued from his hut

He had got scorpions on the brain and must have had a horrible nightmare, for he imagined he had been stung by a monstrous creature, and in the titanic struggle which ensued came to the ground, hammock and all.

Within twenty-four hours one could have collected nearly enough insects to fill the insect-house at the Zoo. The trouble was that they were all so beastly friendly.

In spite of all discomforts, poor food, bad water, insect pests, heat, and a hundred and one other troubles, life here, cut off from the world among the degenerate descendants of what was once a great race, held a fascination. We became a sort of father and mother to these strange people; they would come to us with all their little worries and troubles, and also adopted us as their official "medicine-men."

As was only natural, and quite right, the doctor had to bear the full brunt of the miraculous healing business; and although at times his life was made a misery with their clamours for medicine for ills real and imaginary, yet, god-like, he earned their trust.

I was told that on one occasion the way he saved a man's life was marvellous. A poor wretch had fallen on either his machete, a broken bottle, or something else, which had ripped his stomach open. Unable to move, he lay where he had fallen, with his bowels protruding and flies and ants swarming on the frightful wound. The doctor was routed out from his bush-house by the unfortunate Indian's woman; he replaced the man's entrails and sewed him up. And as far as I know he is living to this day and suffering no ill effects.

CHAPTER XI

RITUAL, SUPERSTITIONS AND HABITS OF THE MAYA KEKCHI INDIANS—THE PRIMITIVE LAW, TO THE DEATH

CIVILIZED life belongs to another world when compared with the native customs in the primitive wilds.

The way in which the natives express themselves is strange and humorous. Many tribes use the feminine only; but with the negro in Jamaica everything is masculine and is expressed by the word "him." For example, whereas in our schools children are taught to say "C stands for Cat," the negro learning his alphabet says "C stands for puss, him named Maria." Everyone is familiar with the way a tom-cat serenades his ladylove; the negro says, "Ram puss, him bawl."

With the Maya Kekchi everything is "she." An Indian died in the village close to us and was, as usual, immediately buried. In the evening his woman with her children and other Indians arrived at our bush-house. Smiling happily, her first words were "She dead" (meaning her man), "me all right now," and she promptly squatted down to listen to our gramophone. They believed that good spirits controlled by our magic made this music. Later the widowed woman told us that at dawn she was leaving for some days, the reason being that her mother, who lived in a remote settlement—"She dead," and her mother's man—"She dead also." In fact there seemed to have been an epidemic of deaths in her family. Her mother had left a priceless possession—a bucket. It did not matter in the least that it was in the last stages of decrepitude and had more holes than tin in it—it was still

of inestimable value, and she proposed to walk a forty-mile trail through the jungle to claim this family heirloom. Tribal right had made her heir to the bucket. After the other Indians had left she still lingered, and finally begged that we would doctor her against the evil spirits which, as all knew, roamed the bush through which she must pass. Needless to say, we lived up to our incarnate divinity.

Their usual evening's amusement was to stroll uninvited into our shack and crowd there, fascinated, squatting down absorbed in the working of the typewriter. At first they thought the tapping was our way of communicating with the spirit-world, and they looked upon the strange machine with superstitious fear. But before long they smiled happily when they saw it working; and we learned that they had finally concluded we were conversing with benevolent spirits, and calling upon them to help the Indians' corn-crops.

Among remote and little-known tribes sacrifices to their various ancient deities are still practised; food offerings are made to Chac, the God of Rain and Thunder, the great Fertility God with whom lies the power to will good or bad crops, the ritual continuing to-day virtually unchanged from the ceremonies of a few thousand years ago. We have found buried offerings to Cuculcan, God of the East, typifying the Breath of Life, who was the Feathered Snake Who Rippled the Waters, one of the greatest of the Mayan deities. Equal in power was Itzamna, the Sky God, Soul of the World and Creator of the World, best described as the Jupiter of the Maya.

We watched the Indians one day after they had planted their *milpa* (corn). They all stood motionless in a circle and remained so for over half an hour, when as if at a given signal they all threw something towards the centre. Undoubtedly this was an ancient ceremony to propitiate the God of Fertility and so ensure good crops.

Their beliefs and legends are grotesque and extraordinary.

They believe that the specimens we excavated were centuries ago buried deep beneath the earth, and that gradually those still unrecovered are working up to the top until the time arrives when they will appear on the surface. The Indians are convinced that this hour will mark the end of the world, and a grand resurrection of their dead. It is worthy of note how the resurrection, reincarnation, the history of the flood, and other biblical stories persist in many degenerate and isolated Indian tribes.

A tragic circumstance brought to our knowledge another of their superstitions. A man from the village was found dead in the bush, whereupon a meeting was held that night and his death was solemnly ascribed to the "Shunan-tunich" (Stone Virgin), a mythical Maya deity who is believed at certain periods of the year to become warm living flesh, so beautiful that any man seeing her as she wanders in the forest is immediately bewitched and seized with the madness of desire. Beckoning, she draws her victim deep within the jungle until he is completely bushed, thereafter remaining with him, day and night mocking him with her laughter until he dies a slow and agonizing death.

Death is viewed among them with the utmost indifference and is not regarded as so important as the killing of a pig. The average life of the Maya Kekchi is extremely short, any who reach the age of thirty being considered old. They asked me how many years I had, and when I told them forty they looked at me with surprise, shook their heads gravely, and murmured in their language, "Very old man." I made them understand that my father was alive. This for some time they could not grasp, but when they did they were convinced that he must be a very great and powerful High Priest, living to this immense age through the clemency of the gods for some especial purpose.

In no way are the Maya Kekchi capable of deep feeling. I have yet to see an Indian shed tears. They cannot

counterfeit affection, and in this are far more honest than people erroneously described as cultured. When one compares the simple wailing ceremony of farewell that the Indians render to their dead with a funeral in a crowded city, the hypocrisy of the latter, with its shedding of tears, its black-coated, top-hatted bearers who adopt a lugubrious expression commensurate with their pay, and the sycophantic fawning of lesser relatives on the chief mourners, leaves a nasty taste in the mouth.

They mate, like the animals, because they want to, because nature calls and they obey her dictates, because they are untrammelled by canons and restrictions as known to us. Married prostitution is unknown to them. They never kiss; they have no love or passion, and in their cohabitation they simply obey the primitive call. And this ordinary function brings forth in them no deeper regard for one another because of its very commonplaceness. Childbirth does not reach the ridiculous ritual which it has become among civilized peoples, with doctors, nurses, twilight sleep, heavy expenditure, and ceremony. It means little or nothing to the Indians, and creates no tie between the man and woman. It is an everyday occurrence and very little trouble.

One of the mysteries we never solved was how they were able to eat putrid food without suffering the slightest inconvenience. They can consume vast quantities in an advanced stage of putrefaction that would more likely than not kill a white man. But with them it has no ill effects.

Both the men and women are capable of carrying immense loads, and trudge miles with their heavy burdens, walking in a bent position. The habit of generations has given them enormous strength in their necks. A strip of flat fibrous bark is passed round the forehead and is fixed sling-fashion to the suspended burden behind. It is no uncommon sight to see them pack a load of two hundred

pounds in this fashion, the major strain being borne by the head and neck. The women surpass the men inasmuch as, added to this, they carry their children on their hips.

Their tribal system is communistic; in turn each helps the other in clearing tracts of bush for planting corn. They keep large numbers of emaciated pigs which can run like greyhounds. These animals are high on the leg, their snouts are abnormally long, and their vertebræ protrude in bony ridges almost through the skin. Each family kills a pig in turn, lends out portions to the head of each bush-house in the village, keeping only sufficient for themselves, and, without making any notes, will remember the particular portion each of the other families has had. When the next man kills, he pays back in kind that part of the animal he has had lent to him previously.

The Maya Kekchi have a chief and a sub-chief who are regularly appointed, and the Indian Court sits at night. One dim lantern burns, and in this primitive Hall of Justice all disputes are settled. Our civilized law-courts might learn much from the simplicity and wisdom of some of their decisions.

An Indian woman had left her man, preferring to live with another. Priming himself with drink, the outraged lord went in search of his rival, and, when they met, the two men came near to killing one another. In due course both men were brought before the court, and the judges, having listened carefully to the evidence, conferred together. This took at least twenty-four hours, for it was a serious offence. Finally they arrived at a decision.

"Send for the woman," they ordered. She was brought before them and arraigned with the two prisoners. The man she had left for her lover was sentenced to pay a nominal fine—a bunch of plantains or something like that. The Indian to whom she had transferred her allegiance had to pay a very much heavier penalty; and as this had to be delivered in kind it meant that at least a tithe would be

taken of whatever he raised, and he would be compelled to work hard so that his normal production might increase in proportion. The judges then turned their attention to the woman.

"You," they said, "being the cause of all the trouble, must pay four times as much as your lover." Verily the decision of a Solomon. It would entail probably two years of hard work for her to satisfy the fine in full. But their quarrels amongst themselves are usually smoothed over without such stern measures as these.

Occasionally, after they have brewed a quantity of their native drink and indulged in a drunken orgy for several days, the men become surly and even dangerous. We had working for us an exceptionally good Indian with the surprising name of Velasquez. How he came by it goodness knows. He and another Indian had been drinking heavily, and over something trivial a serious quarrel sprang up between them which ended in a machete duel. It was a horrible and bloody affair. The machete, which every native carries, is a terrible weapon, used principally for clearing their plantations of smaller trees with trunks up to six and eight inches in diameter, which the long powerful knives fell with ease. Inflamed with drink, the two men suddenly attacked one another, in their drunken condition not realizing what they were doing. Out flashed their machetes, and in a few minutes Velasquez lay a mutilated corpse, while the other man, horribly gashed and cut, died shortly afterwards. It is extremely rare for pure-blooded Indians to fight like this, but among half-breeds it is fairly common.

I well remember a fight that took place between two men in Guatemala. It was towards evening of a pay-day on one of the plantations, and they had drunk a large quantity of the horrible white spirit outrageously labelled rum which is sold in the *cantinas*. This foul stuff is so strong that on the rare occasions when I have tried it I have found it

burn my mouth and throat like liquid fire. I cannot swallow it.

For some hours these two men had sat pouring the poison into their insides until they were not merely drunk but had passed the boundary of sanity and arrived at a semi-bestial condition. Without any reason whatsoever they stood up, with great difficulty balancing themselves, and leered at one another stupidly with half-closed, bloodshot eyes. One of them slowly raised his machete and struck a wavering blow at his friend. It glanced from the side of his head and almost severed an ear, the blade biting deep into the shoulder. The man attacked, with the blood pouring down his face, retaliated by striking at his assailant who stood dazed, waiting for the blow. And so they hacked and cut at one another. Sometimes a machete found its mark, but so erratic were the blows that more often than not they missed and bit into the ground. Several times one or the other over-balanced and fell, when his adversary would solemnly wait for him to rise before delivering his next onslaught.

It is certain neither of them could have felt the slightest pain, so completely numbed were they by the amount of spirit they had consumed. But finally they were mutilated so horribly that they both collapsed and expired.

CHAPTER XII

WE LIVE IN ANOTHER WORLD—WE SAVE OUR FRIENDS THE HUMMING-BIRDS, AND ADOPT A BABY APE

As I said before, in spite of all the discomforts it was most interesting to live here in what is virtually another world. It is difficult to convey the joy and relief of being freed from letters, telegrams, and telephones, and the irritation of the eternal newspapers which in civilization one perforce must read. The world's greatest curse—money—became an unreal, evil memory; the pretence, the shams, the artificiality and stress of living drifted into the background, and in a surprisingly short time were entirely forgotten. The predominant factors of life were food and the weather. A reversion to the simple came rapidly and automatically; hearing, sight and smell were sharpened by environment and necessity. A clock or watch was unnecessary; in a comparatively short while we could instinctively gauge time with fair accuracy, and after some months we found our dormant senses asserted themselves to the extent that without compass we knew from which direction the wind was blowing, and could tell when climatic changes were imminent, unerringly sensing the approach of rain.

So completely were we cut off from the world that the Indians here had never heard of the Great War—in fact had heard of nothing outside their own tiny village.

The lure of the jungle is irresistible; and when once the untrammelled freedom of the wilds has been known the life of a great city in comparison appears insanity. The jungle is eternal freedom—a city perpetual restriction. After tasting for a short time the "blessings" of

civilization there comes an insistent call to return—and return one must.

Not only the people and the flora and fauna, but even the heavens are totally different. It is strange to see the stars in opposite positions, the Great Bear upside down and the moon vertical. From a blue sky thunder roars, an electrical storm turns a placid world in the space of a few minutes into a raging chaos; impenetrable masses of blue-black clouds bank up mysteriously, and just when it seems certain that a rainstorm is about to break the clouds dissolve as if by magic, the sun blazes in a clear sky and not a drop falls.

During the day the air is filled with sound—the rasping of legions of cicadas, mingled, as evening descends, with a medley of other strange noises; hundreds of parrots congregating in the tree-tops set up a raucous jazz-band; crickets, tree-frogs, and lizards all join in a tremendous orchestra. When night has fallen innumerable fire-beetles flash like meteors of light in and out among the trees; these strange coleoptera can turn on and off at will the brilliant greenish light which emanates from them. On the air rises the deep booming of a frog, to be answered by the call of its mate; others from their retreats in the rotting vegetation and mosses join in until for miles around echoes their throaty music. A night-bird shrieks; a low moan from some shy nocturnal creature vibrates eerily as it rises and falls. The hills resound with and throw back the deep-throated bark of the howler-apes—the jungle teems with sound, with the scream of the tiger-cat and jaguar and heavy cracklings in the bush. One can sense the invisible—the mysterious—which are part of a primeval forest.

The valley of the river was an entomologist's paradise. Moisture is a necessity to the innumerable butterflies, and as the surrounding country was parched, no rain having fallen for weeks, they congregated in their thousands on

the damp mud where the water had receded. They would cluster there, packed tightly together with their wings shut, so that by carefully closing the finger and thumb on the tips of their folded wings one could pick them up and examine them. All entomologists know of that common way of attracting moths—by treacling trees. As an experiment we thought we would try a similar means with the butterflies. Mixing rum with jam (we could not spare sugar), we plentifully besmeared some stones and old stumps of trees on the river bank, and waited close by to watch results. The last thing that we expected happened. The appetizing feast failed to attract a single butterfly, but after waiting for some time we heard a rustling in the bush; a squat head with beady eyes, followed by long sinuous coils, emerged and slithered to where we had placed our lure. I had raised my gun to fire when Lady Brown touched my arm.

"Wait," she whispered. There were more rustlings, and another wriggling reptile joined the first. Instead of shooting we determined to watch, and finally five of the creatures were busily engaged in sucking in our jam and rum, thoroughly enjoying themselves—it was a red-letter day in their snakey lives. We ought to have shot them, but we didn't. They were not the deadly species, and had given us so much interest and amusement that we felt they were entitled to their liberty, though I loathe snakes. But we wasted no more jam and rum.

Our food would perhaps appeal to a connoisseur as extraordinary. Occasionally we dined luxuriously on parrots; another day it would be the gibbon, a rodent which looks like a large rat, that composed our meal. Iguanos (large lizards) and their eggs all helped the bill of fare; seasoning the bush provided, while tortillas took the place of bread. Frijoles (native beans) made a savoury dish, grapefruit and limes were in abundance, and almost overhanging the bush-house were trees laden with large

magenta custard-apples. By hunting we could obtain the beautiful curassow, a bird as large as a turkey and equally good eating, deer, wild hog and pig, and last but not least, "jungle-stew," a feast of Lucullus—the recipe of which I refuse to disclose.

Nearby our shack two large falcons had a nest; from dawn to sunset they flew backwards and forwards carrying snakes in their talons. Perched on the limb of a dead tree the male sent forth a harsh cry, and at once the female appeared, and together they fed on the writhing reptiles. Snakes seemed to be their only food—blessed be the falcons!

Within ten yards of the bush-house a tiny metallic-green and purple humming-bird had her nest in a small vine-covered tree. The vine was in bloom, a mass of pale mauve blossoms, and all day long the male bird was kept busy waging war against the scarlet and green butterflies that came with their long probosces extended to extract honey from the flowers. Valiantly he fought and routed them that his wife might sit on her eggs in peace. He was never away, day or night, more than a few minutes at a time, except to catch flies for her. He was a most devoted and model husband.

It fell to us to save the lives, if not of him and his wife, certainly of their family. We were excavating at the ruins when we noticed the Indians stop work and point in the direction of our bush-house. One look was sufficient—without wasting a moment we called the Indians together and started pell-mell down the trail towards the shack. Great columns of smoke were rising hundreds of feet into the air over a considerable stretch of the jungle close to the bush-house wherein lay all our possessions and the specimens we had recovered. By the time we reached it the fire was perilously near, and advancing rapidly in the direction of the shack. Every Indian we could commandeer was pressed into service, and immediately began

enlarging with machetes the open space around our headquarters. Volumes of acrid smoke swept over us, while the crackling and roaring of the flames quivered the air less than a few hundred yards away. Clouds of ash were shooting upwards and slowly settling, like snow, to be caught again as they approached the ground in the heated upblast from the raging furnace. Whirled aloft they disappeared, blown across the country for miles. Everything was orange; the sun looked like a suspended orange dimly showing through the curling smoke-clouds, and casting a curious orange light over the jungle, while everyone looked as though suffering from a severe attack of jaundice. The Indians had reached the little tree where our friends the humming-birds had their home, and were about to lay it low when we ran forward and stopped them just in time.

The result was that all round the bush-house small trees and jungle were felled, thus saving not only the shack from being wiped out, but also the nest of the humming-birds; and after the fire had passed on there still remained a small, isolated, flowering tree where finally the eggs were hatched and the proud father and mother lived happily with their offspring.

As no damage had been done we hailed the fire as a blessing. For weeks past we had been tormented by a plague of ants which swarmed into our bush-house from the surrounding jungle, and were devastating in their ravages. The only portions of our stores safe from their attack were the canned goods. We tried many ways of keeping them out of the sugar, flour, and other provisions, even suspending the bags by strips of liana from the poles in the roof, but all to no purpose. When we left for the ruins in the morning all would be well; but on returning later we would see a thin, black, ever-moving line creeping up and down the walls, along the poles and ropes of liana and thence into our stores. There was only one way to



OUR BUSH HOUSE AND OUR BABY APE

counter their ravages, and that was to surround everything with water. We even had to rest the legs of our camp-beds in tins filled with it.

We believed the fire would destroy these pestilential insects and their nests; but the cunning and intelligence of ants is remarkable, and they had gone deep down in the earth and remained in their catacombs until all danger had passed; immediately the ground cooled they swarmed out again in their millions. To attempt to exterminate ants is like trying to stem the tide, and to the very end they were masters of the situation.

As the days passed our appearance slowly changed. The doctor's clothes became, to put it mildly, somewhat frayed. Lady Brown, who for weeks had lived in shirt, breeches and high-boots, had her arms and face tanned the colour of mahogany, while as a protection against insects (though the doctor and Lady Brown swore it was laziness) I had grown a beard. I must confess it was rather an awful affair, black and curly and growing square, and together with my burnt, weather-beaten face, made me look like nothing on God's green earth.

We had adopted another pet apart from Cuthbert, a baby ape belonging to the species of howler-monkeys which are black and have quite large beards. He was the most affectionate little beggar I have ever known. Every day he accompanied us to the ruins, and on our return would immediately clamour for his evening meal. It was pathetic to see how human this little creature was. And the noises he made—well, one has only to enter a large restaurant or dance-hall to hear a faithful reproduction of them. As soon as he had finished eating he always went through the same antics, his way, doubtless, of expressing thanks. He would climb on Lady Brown's shoulder, nestling close to her face, nosing round her neck and playing with her hair, and after a few minutes, leave her and come over to me. Invariably I still had my hat on; as a protection against insects and

the frequent falling from the roof of scorpions, etc., a hat seems to become glued to one's head, especially when one is not blessed with much hair where it should be. The little animal always snatched it off and flung it on the floor. He would then cuddle against me, making a soft growling noise; this would be followed by his rubbing his head against my beard, after which, like a child, he proceeded to examine my hirsute adornment, with both hands gently feeling and pulling it, and again rubbing his face against it. This would be followed by a harder tugging and further investigation, while his growls of pleasure grew, and he would chuckle just like a baby.

For a long time I wondered why he took such a great interest in my beard. Then one day it came to me in a flash. As I explained, the species to which he belonged have their faces adorned with a mass of hair; even when they are young there is a considerable growth round the lower part of their faces. And there is no doubt that the comfort he found, and the pleasure he took in examining my beard, arose from his belief that I was his father.

Little did I dream when my beard was growing that it would play an important part in the lives of the Indians—would be a topic for serious discussions and the reason for the chief and his headmen calling several meetings in the village. But so it happened.

I had not noticed anything unusual until one day while we were up at the ruins Lady Brown remarked,

“Do you notice how intently the Indians have been watching you lately?”

“Why on earth should they?” I demanded in surprise.

“I don't know why they should,” she answered, “but they are.” For the life of me I could not see any reason for it, and after arguing upon the subject for some time I decided to keep my eyes open. She was right. Every now and again I caught them furtively watching me.

At the end of the day, when we returned to the

bushhouse, we discussed the matter further, and came to the conclusion that there was undoubtedly something in the air. This was confirmed when we learned that the Chief and his headmen had summoned a conference of all the Indians in the village for that night.

"Damned if I know what their game is," I said. "I hope to the Lord they aren't up to mischief."

"It's not that," Lady Brown answered decisively. "They're happy enough, and working better than ever. But you know what they're like with their omens and superstitions, and I'm certain they've got something on their minds."

"What should they have on their minds?" I asked, at that moment being busily engaged with a bowl of "jungle-stew."

"How should I know, idiot? But I know I'm right," she replied forcibly, and later her observations proved correct.

CHAPTER XIII

I AM PRESENTED WITH A BRIDE—THE RUTHLESS JUNGLE

AT the time of the invasion of Cortes the great Maya race had degenerated, but they yet numbered many thousands, and the Spanish Conquistadores were ruthless in their treatment of these inoffensive people. What the Indians suffered has never been truly recorded; but we do know that the brutality of the Spaniards was such that they aimed at the complete extermination of the race. They had no mercy; the male Indians they captured were tortured and their women raped. It is a matter of history, and is eloquent of what the Indians must have endured, that in one instance a chief with some hundreds of his followers stood on the edge of a precipice and, as the Conquistadores advanced, he and the men, women, and children surrounding him, at a word of command hurled themselves headlong from the brink to be shattered hundreds of feet below, preferring death to capture by the Spaniards with the certainty of torture.

We had pressed all the male Indians into our service: The men, it may here be explained, although having hair growing thickly on their heads are yet as devoid of hair on face and body as the women. Among the Maya Kekchi living in the village and working for us the tales and legends of the fierce, bearded Spanish Conquistadores still lived, and there is no doubt that this isolated remnant, the direct descendants of the once great Maya race, knew they had sunk into a state of degeneration and must soon be extinct. In an endeavour to find some means of once again becoming a virile people they had conceived an inspired idea that I,



MY WOULD-BE BRIDE



NATIVE HUTS IN THE BATANICOS COUNTRY (see p. 134)

with my big, black beard, was the same type of man that centuries ago had conquered and enslaved them. They were obsessed with a belief that they needed new blood, that stronger children might be bred, and that by this means they might again become a great race.

For days they had been furtively watching me, as Lady Brown had noticed; I suppose I must have looked very different from them in my high-boots, Bedford-cord riding-breeches, belt, khaki shirt, and under my sombrero my tanned and bearded face. Added to this I stood a head and shoulders above the tallest of them.

The morning after their meeting I was disturbed at daybreak by a hum of conversation outside the shack. Through the cracks in the wooden sides I could distinctly see that the Indians were congregating outside. I jumped hurriedly from my camp-bed and shouted to Lady Brown.

“ You’re right, Mabs—there’s trouble with the natives! Quick—get up and dress.”

In the few minutes that elapsed before she appeared I belted my guns round my waist, saw that our rifles were loaded, and went to the entrance. But to my surprise, far from being in warlike mood, the Indians were all smiles, and, what was stranger, the entire village, even the women and children who were crowding round, had turned out in *fiesta* costume. There they stood, complete with band (two tom-toms and a few reed instruments). In front, holding a girl by the hand, was the Chief with his headmen and a man who, speaking a little halting English, acted as interpreter.

We went outside, and I enquired the reason for this festive occasion and why we should be disturbed. Thereupon there followed a lengthy preamble. Finally the Chief came to the point, explaining that they had held meetings in the village, that they desired fresh blood amongst themselves and wanted children born to them, tall and with beards like mine.

Here Lady Brown disgraced herself by making a noise like a soda-water syphon.

They had chosen their most beautiful young girl—she whom the Chief was holding by the hand; and it was the wish of them all that she should be my woman, live with me and occupy my bed, that she should clean and work for me and be mine to do with as I chose—with the express provision that she must have a child—a child who would be tall and, most important of all, have a black beard. Should the evil spirits prevail and this much-wished-for event not happen, it would indeed be a misfortune for the Maya Kekchi. But it was to be understood that in such an event, as a recompense to the Chief for providing me with such a beautiful and desirable young girl (who should still be mine), I must give him my riding-breeches.

I had to turn away—it was impossible to keep a straight face. Lady Brown had disappeared, and by strange sounds proceeding from the shack I knew the reason. Now how on earth they imagined one could conjure up a ready-made son with a black beard I don't know, and they had evidently not taken into consideration the question of time. It was an illustration of the simplicity of the Indian mind, and showed how little they can reason in the abstract.

The position obviously bristled with difficulties—it was devilish awkward and would need careful handling. They had done me the greatest honour by choosing their most beautiful daughter and bestowing her upon me; to refuse would have been tantamount to an insult to the whole tribe and would have turned them from friends to enemies. I was between Scylla and Charybdis. Then inspiration came—there was one loop-hole, and one only.

I went inside the shack and found Lady Brown sitting doubled up with laughter on a packing-case.

“Mabs, for heaven's sake stop that noise. This is dead serious.”



THE GREAT STAIRWAY BEFORE AND AFTER CLEARING

"Serve you right," she choked. "You would grow that hideous beard."

"For God's sake, come to earth," I retorted. "Do realize we are in an infernal hole. What are we going to do?"

"There's no 'we' about it—what are *you* going to do?"

"Now look here," I went on, ignoring this last observation. "We must get out of this mess somehow, and quickly. There's only one way—you are my wife."

"What?" she shouted, her merriment coming to a sudden end.

"My wife," I repeated with emphasis. "I've got to tell these Indians that it is impossible for me, though deeply honoured, to take that girl, because by our custom we are allowed only one wife—and you are the wife."

Lady Brown immediately commenced to argue.

"It's no use talking," I retorted. "Whether you like it or not, it's the only way, and in any case perhaps the idea is already in their minds."

Without waiting for further objections I went outside, where I explained that I already had a wife (pointing to Lady Brown who had followed me), and by the laws of my gods could take no other. Had it been possible I should have welcomed the beautiful girl they had brought to me, and in due course she would doubtless have had tall sons with black beards. But the fact that I already had a white wife made it impossible.

The whole tribe looked downcast. Then the Chief brightened up somewhat; a ray of hope had penetrated his brain. Diffidently he asked me would I be free to take their daughter if my white wife departed this world? To which I replied, "Without a doubt," whereupon they stoically returned to the village, all of them, I am sure, devoutly hoping for the early demise of Lady Brown.

The dry season was nearing its end; the warning of this

was unmistakable; the lightning which flickered across the sky every night was the sure forerunner of approaching rains, and the signal for us to leave, for no white man could remain in the jungle here during the wet season and survive.

A few days later we walked the trail to the ruins and climbed to the top of the highest pyramid. From the summit there stretched out a wonderful view. For over a thousand miles to the north-west lay the dreaded Peten Bush, grim and impenetrable, vast areas of which no white man has ever explored. It is a sinister and deadly jungle; every tree, bush, and vine bears its own specific thorn. The trunk and leaves of the lancietta palm bristle with miniature daggers; another species of palm is covered in fine black lances which pierce like darning-needles not only through cloth, but right through the leather of top-boots. Other trees have immense thorns growing from the sides which look like the limpets on rocks but terminate in a spear-head which is capable of ripping open the flesh. One tree which is abundant is called by the Indians in our language the Cockscomb; it throws out thorns which are three to four inches long, and curve upwards.

Adjoining and actually a part of this little-known territory is the country wherein dwell the Lacadone Indians, while north of this tribe is the land of the Santa Cruz Indians—possibly one of the most blood-thirsty races in the world, through whose country no white man has ever yet been able to penetrate. To this day its interior is a land of mystery, and fearful are the legends and tales one hears of the sacrifices and atrocities committed by those morose, untamed, and sullen people. Within the fastnesses of this jungle anything may lie hidden; it would not be surprising if tribes dwell there that have never advanced beyond the Stone Age.

This region is infested with many of the most deadly and noxious insects. There is the gusáno fly which, quick



1. GREAT PYRAMID AFTER CLEARING

2. BURIED RUINS

as lightning, pierces the skin, usually on the back of the neck, and deposits an egg beneath. So subtly is this accomplished that in a land where one is always more or less in a state of irritation it passes for the time unnoticed. A few days later a slight swelling appears; it grows rapidly until it is exactly as if a boil were forming. But one day on feeling it, the "boil" will move. The solution to this phenomenon is that the egg deposited by the gusáno fly has hatched out and become a maggot commonly known as the screw-worm, which when full-grown is quite half an inch in length. It is a disgusting feeling to know that a maggot is feeding on one.

There is a species of doctor-fly (*Tabanus*) with orange body and vivid green head; we have been stung many times and not known it until the swelling has started. The action of its poison is most severe. I have seen my hand, fingers, and within an hour the forearm, swell to a tremendous size, the pain and inflammation being acute. Lady Brown was once stung on the cheek by one of these pests, and for days her face was swollen and distorted beyond recognition. It was like severe erysipelas.

Transcending these in horror is an insect which deposits its eggs in the nose while the victim is asleep, and the result is appalling. The eggs hatch out in due course and their maggot larvæ feed on and eat their way into the membrane, and an awful death is inevitable. Another creature lays its eggs in the ear—also while one is sleeping—and maggots hatch out and death in an agonizing and ghastly form is certain.

Looking out from the top of the pyramid to the southwest, here again a solid wall of jungle met our eyes. Beyond, we could see mountainous ranges towering one behind the other, covered in primeval forest and bush; yet undoubtedly throughout this dreadful region the Maya once lived, and I should say that there are certain to be ruined cities hidden there awaiting discovery.

As we stood with the jungle all round us—solemn, majestic, sepulchral, the giant trees gave us the impression of looking down through the centuries with a calm serenity on the struggles and efforts of the countless generations that have come and passed. In the setting sun the full immensity of the ruins came to us with overwhelming force. Slowly the sun sank, the sky crimsoned, and a red glow tinged the jungle and the desolate courtyards, terraces, and pyramids of this great city—a city of fallen stones which we have christened “Lubaantun” (Maya interpretation of “Place of Fallen Stones”).

Now the heavens in the west became a blaze of fire, and as the rim of the great crimson orb touched the jungle the forest appeared to rise up, embrace, and then savagely devour it. The afterglow followed, and the sky changed to the palest blue flecked with vivid gold and pink streamers which finally died away, giving place to a vault of uniform duck-egg green; and when the first stars appeared a solemn hush—the hush of death—settled down over this ancient burial-place. It crept over and enveloped the ruins in a funeral pall. Fanciful shapes appeared, and a cold breath—the forerunner of the night breeze—passed by, faintly stirring the leaves and sighing through the jungle. We shivered—it was uncanny—ghostly.

Then the spell was broken, and magically the forest awoke. All round rose the jungle orchestra—the music of crickets and cicadas, the booming of frogs, the weird cries of night-birds, and the crashing through the bush of nocturnal creatures. As the mantle of night descended and we were wrapt in its atramental folds, across the sky the lightning flickered eerily. We spoke no word, but turned and in silence made our way back along the trail to the bush-house.

Some days later the task of packing was completed, but I knew nothing of this; neither was I interested in our trip down the river in dug-outs manned by our faithful



SECTIONS OF THE CITADEL OF LUBAANTUN

Indians. I had gone down under that curse of the tropics—malarial fever; afterwards I learned of the devotion and care rendered by Lady Brown as day and night I raved in delirium. During the whole way down the river in the insufferable heat she held a shade over my head to keep the blazing sun from me, bathing my lips continually with water, and so cramped had her position been that at night she had to be lifted from the dug-out. I shall ever remember her self-sacrifice.

When she finally got me on the yacht, instead of sailing direct to Belize she gave orders that the boat should make for a small palm-clad coral-sand atoll in the Caribbean about twenty miles off-shore; and here the trade-winds and freedom from the irritation of the insects of the mainland did more for me than any doctors or medicine could have done. As soon as the fever had subsided we made our plans, and determined to travel through out-lying and little-known regions of Guatemala and continue on through Salvador and into the interior of Nicaragua, our final goal being Panama. Once having made up our minds we broke camp, transferred our duffel to the boat and left for Belize.

CHAPTER XIV

THE WONDERS OF THE RIO DULCE

ON arriving in Belize we were fortunate enough to find that a little coast-boat would be leaving in a day or two for Puerto Barrios, the gateway on the Atlantic side of Central America for Guatemala City which lies two hundred miles inland and is reached by a railroad which winds through mountainous country and jungle, the journey taking about thirteen hours from this port. On leaving Belize we were sorry to have to part from Dr. Gann, for we had all been a most convivial party.

Puerto Barrios has a wonderful natural bay framed by the same dense jungle which for hundreds of miles fringes the coast, and remains unbroken except where half a dozen isolated settlements have sprung up.

Thanks to the courtesy of the United Fruit Company, who placed at our disposal their magnificent high-power boat, the *Wild Goose*, I was able to gratify an ambition I had always cherished—to explore the Rio Dulce. My desire to do this had been further fired by the accounts Lady Brown had given me of the beauty of the scenery, after her memorable trip from Punta Gorda. In luxury we left Puerto Barrios, and proceeded along the coast to the mouth of the Rio Dulce thirteen miles away. The sea was like glass. We travelled close to the sandy beaches, where the solid jungle grows almost down to the water's edge. A few miles inland rose mountainous hills clothed in dense greenery on which detached clouds were settling, to be almost immediately dissolved by the heat rising from the forest. After about ten miles we reached the mouth

of the river and turned inland, passing the miniature settlement of Livingston which nestles on a little promontory.

It is difficult adequately to describe the grandeur and exotic loveliness of the scenery bordering the Rio Dulce. We glided into a gorge whose immense rock-face towered high on either side; it seemed impossible that trees could find root in the precipitous rocky walls, yet from the edge of the water to the crest the cliffs were clothed in vegetation—wonderful palms, masses of flowering vine and gigantic airplants. From trees which leaned out at a perilous angle from the cliff-sides ropes of liana hung hundreds of feet down into the water, adding to the miracle of beauty. The river itself was a shade of indefinable green which blended perfectly with the green of the jungle, and on its smooth surface exquisite shadow effects were thrown from the palms and the riot of tropical foliage on either side.

Turning an abrupt bend, the great cliffs rose still higher, over a thousand feet sheer from the river, and we in our boat were pigmies in this stupendous gorge. It gave a sensation of utter insignificance, so completely were we enveloped and overwhelmed by the grandeur and majesty of our surroundings. They held a solemnity that could be felt—only the purr of the engine broke the silence; speech would have destroyed the indefinable mystery, and been hostile to the cathedral hush that wrapt us round.

For some miles this continued, until the walls of the canyon began to sink lower and lower until finally they merged into the eternal undulating jungle-land, and we reached El Golfete Chicito (The Little Gulf). This in reality is quite a large lake, the water of which is a uniform shamrock green. Tiny islands rise from it irregularly; on one of them, a few yards from the reeded water's edge, stood a solitary Carib hut. The occupants, with numerous offspring (the latter completely naked) ran out as we passed. The children gave one look and fled,

uttering a strange noise which could not be called a yell—it was like the strangled, high-pitched yapping of a dog; while the man and woman, dreadful-looking objects, more like emaciated animals than human beings, watched us in stupid amazement. The strange pair would have stirred the interest of an anthropologist. In height and features they might have been twins; remove the long, matted, blue-black hair from the woman and cover her shrivelled, hanging breasts, and the two figures would have been indistinguishable. It is quite possible they were brother and sister. Having only animal instincts with a correspondingly low mentality, incestuous relationship would so be perfectly natural to them. There they were, male and female, carrying on the race.

Lady Brown turned to me. "How is it possible that human beings can live in a place like that?" On the face of it—inexplicable; but, even more unanswerable, by what miracle were they able to raise children? As soon as the sun sank the little island must have been veiled in a miasmatic mist rising from the lake thick with mosquitoes. It would be impossible to avoid persistent attacks of malarial fever; their drinking-water, impregnated with decayed vegetable matter, if viewed under a powerful microscope must have been a seething mass of bacilli. Many times we have foolishly examined our own drinking-water, and when dire necessity has compelled us to drink we have almost vomited at the thought of what we were swallowing.

"The mystery to me," I said, "is not how people live in these places, but why they choose to." And this is a question we have never been able to solve satisfactorily. The principal food of this wretched family would be a never-ending diet of fish from the lake—every day from birth to death an eternal monotony.

Both Lady Brown and I have at different times attempted to converse with people like these, and have found

them almost mutes, having nearly lost speech by reason of their complete isolation. And it is no exaggeration to state that their intelligence was on a par with, if not inferior to, that of the higher type of anthropoid ape.

From the left bank of the lake, swamp, bush, and jungle stretch unbroken to where a mountain range towers to the skies. On the right in the distance hills pile one behind the other and merge into the horizon; another great tract of country unknown, for we were unable to learn of any white man ever having set foot in the vast forests that surround this lake. It is almost certain that more ruins of the great Maya civilization would be discovered somewhere in this area if it were explored.

From the head of the lake the river leads to El Golfete Grande (The Great Gulf), which is over forty miles across. This river, together with the lakes, is the waterway used to reach a small settlement in the interior known as Coban, where some years ago a colony of Germans located themselves. The necessity of returning before dark prevented us, much to our regret, from travelling farther.

On our way back while crossing the little gulf, our attention was drawn to tremendous bursts of water, and we slowed down. For a quarter of an hour we watched an enormous fish leaping into the air and sending up showers of spray as it crashed back; the lake boiled with thousands of other fish breaking the surface. Ahead we saw a long, gnarled log gliding along, driven by some mysterious agency. With the engine going dead slow we stole close to it until it was within a few yards of our bow, when the gnarled log submerged in a swirl. It is extraordinary how, even when quite near, a swimming alligator can be mistaken for a log of wood.

After leaving the river mouth for the open sea our return to Puerto Barrios was most interesting. In one place we noticed thousands of pelicans and frigate-birds alternately hovering and swooping downwards. As we

drew nearer the reason became clear—the triangular dorsal fin of an eighteen-foot shark cut the surface. Suddenly the water boiled, and a wave and sheets of spray were flung into the air; the tiger of the deep seized a twenty-pound jack, and as it tore and rent its prey the birds swept down, fighting for and snatching the scraps which floated on the surface.

Later, on our port side appeared a shoal of porpoise. Placidly they rolled along in their curious characteristic fashion, then suddenly became wildly excited; the sea burst open, and clear into the air with a rush rose a torpedo-shaped seven-foot porpoise, glistening in the setting sun. It performed a beautiful curve as it crashed down. Again and again this was repeated. There is no question that the porpoises were being attacked by some voracious creature—possibly a relation of the shark—lurking in the depths, yet not once were we able to get a sight of the monster. Finding their manœuvres of leaping into the air unavailing, the shoal broke up and scattered in every direction. At one time there must have been a hundred of them breaking the surface.

No matter how many times one might travel from Puerto Barrios along the coast and up the Rio Dulce, each time one would be certain to experience fresh thrills, while the mysterious beauty of the river could never pall. It is strange that the United Fruit Company, whose boats call at Puerto Barrios, do not arrange trips of this description. I am sure they would attract many people, and give them a realization of the tropics that they cannot get by visiting ports at which the boats dock.

We remained in Puerto Barrios for a few days, and as there are no roads leading from here, Lady Brown and I chose an afternoon to wander up the railroad track, closed in by the solid walls of jungle which grew on either side to the edge of the line.

We had walked about a mile when we encountered a

boa-constrictor, eleven to twelve feet long, stretched basking in the blazing sun between the metals. We nearly stepped on it before its loud hiss made us jump back with more haste than dignity. It was quite unconcerned; I picked up one of the heavy stones on which the road-bed is laid, cautiously approached and flung it at the creature's head. I scored a miss, whereupon it contemptuously slithered off. Close by was a dead calf, not more than three weeks old, which appeared to have been crushed by the snake.

A little farther on we came across a dead beetle—a giant of its species—five inches in length. An army of ants were very busy trying to carry away the corpse, but except for a slight movement its weight resisted their efforts. As we stood there, fresh battalions of the industrious little insects continually arrived; indefatigable, they would no doubt succeed in the end. Many times we have watched ants dragging seemingly impossible weights—dead caterpillars, cockroaches, scorpions, and on one occasion a large tarantula spider; their patience is limitless, and they appear to work under some kind of systematic direction. Thinking of the word “direction,” in its other connotation, one may record it as an observed fact that the instinct and perception of an ant are so keen that it may be five hundred yards from its home in the densest of jungles, and yet, with a stream and other barriers intervening, it will unerringly find its way back somehow.

Having trekked about four miles, sweating like blazes, with our breeches and shirts wet through, we sat down to rest; we would have given a lot of money for a glass of ice water. We were thinking of returning when Lady Brown touched me on the arm and pointed silently up the track. I turned. Squatting on the line and looking at us in amazement was a white-faced monkey. Its unflattering opinion of us both was emphatically expressed when it screwed up its face in a horrible grimace, turned its back

and stalked cat-like into the jungle. We burst out laughing—the same thought had come to us both; how often had we seen urchins behave in exactly the same way! Monkeys are humorously human—or is it that we are humorously simian?

CHAPTER XV

THE RUINS OF QUIRIGUA—WE DECIDE TO CROSS GUATEMALA

FROM Puerto Barrios we had sent our heavy baggage ahead by the railroad, and Lady Brown and I, travelling light, broke our journey at Quirigua, where spectacular Maya ruins lie in a clearing of the jungle on the banks of the Motagua River. There is no doubt a significance in such a large number of Maya ruins being on river-banks. It points to the fact that these ancient people used waterways as their means of communicating with the coast. We have recently proved that they were seamen of no mean order, and that their navigation was not confined to river transport alone.

The ruins at Quirigua are entirely different from, and miniature in comparison with, those of Lubaantun, the site we had left within the last few weeks in British Honduras. The great citadel of that city would alone completely cover the Quirigua ruins.

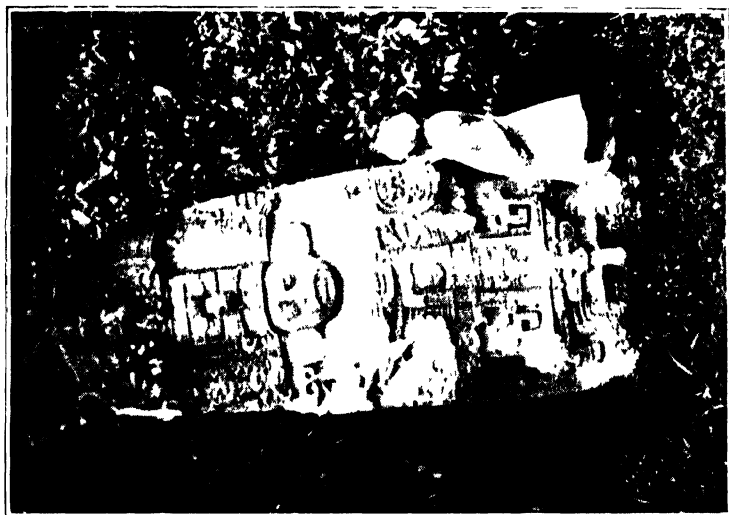
On arriving here we found two large mounds; on the top of one are the remains of a building. In a flat, open space between the mounds, by a stupendous engineering feat the Maya had erected great monoliths and megalithic stones which are exquisitely sculptured. For over fourteen hundred years they have been exposed to the elements, and yet the intricate carving easily approaches, if indeed it does not surpass, the finest efforts of the present day. The general beauty of the work fills one with astonishment. There are series of dates, figures, and historical events. Carved on one of the monoliths is the face of a Maya queen, awful in its majesty. As I looked—it may have

been due to light variation—the expression of the face appeared to change and become cynical and mocking. Perhaps it was the silence and mysticism of the place affecting me, but I actually seemed to feel a message issuing from the lips of the graven mask—"I, once a ruler over millions, adored and worshipped, am no more; my name forgotten, my cities places of fallen stones, places of desolation; my people swept from the face of the earth. Life, civilizations, and empires are ephemeral; for over fifteen hundred years I have looked out on the futile efforts of humanity. Centuries will pass, and still the riddle of my race will remain unsolved. Yet——"

The spell was broken, a blazing shaft of sunlight pierced the foliage and struck full on the graven face. The mockery disappeared—once more the dreaded Maya queen looked forth over the jungle calm, serene, majestic.

Rivalling in interest the great monoliths or single pillar-like blocks of stone are the megaliths. Their individual weight must be colossal, running to many tons. One represents a jaguar, another a grotesque toad. The series of dates and sculpturing on every one are obviously not the work of a novice; the symmetrical perfection stands out a mute tribute to the art of a higher adept. But these are unfortunately much more weather-worn and undecipherable than the stelæ. One great mass of stone stands out pre-eminently above the rest. It is a gigantic sacrificial stone, entirely covered with dates, figures, and glyphs. The top has been cut so that a person stretched on his back with arms extended has the chest raised and the skin drawn taut.

I climbed to the top and lay there, and it was easy to reconstruct the sacrificial ceremony. On the flat roof of a building facing this stone one could picture the king, nobles, and court dignitaries seated in state. The victim lay full-length on the sacrificial stone with the skin stretched tightly over the convex chest, while the high priest, standing



by with arm upraised, clutched his obsidian knife. At a given time, when the rays of the sun fell directly on the victim, down flashed the knife; the chest of the human offering was struck open and the heart, still pulsing, torn from the body and placed in a bowl as an oblation to the god. The body would then be hurled from the top, and as it struck the ground the assembled thousands would rush forward in fanatical frenzy, struggling to tear away fragments of flesh which they immediately ate, believing that in partaking of the sacrifice they would propitiate the god to whom the offering was made, and thus receive his blessing.

We were both conscious of the same feeling—a realization of the immensity of the riddle held in the jungles of Central America, of a great mystery awaiting discovery.

Many theories have been brought forward as to the way in which the Maya could hew monoliths and blocks of stone from an unknown quarry and transport them over distances which must have been considerable, since it is established that there are no places near from which the stone could have been hewn. It is questionable whether unlimited man-power can account for this; neither is satisfactory the ingenious idea that has been advanced that these masses of stone were moved by hauling them over felled trees, the theory being that sap squeezed from the green wood by the immense weight of stone that passed over the trunks rendered them slippery and made a natural slide. There is much we do not know—much that no man has yet discovered. But whether the mystery will ever be solved is another question.

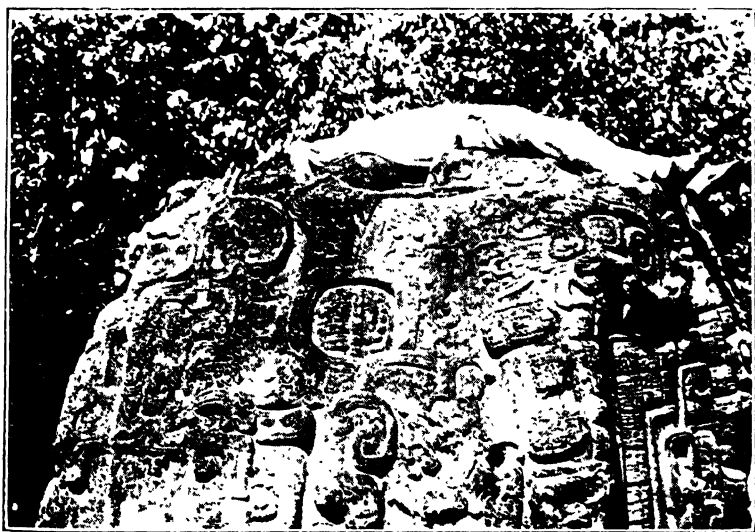
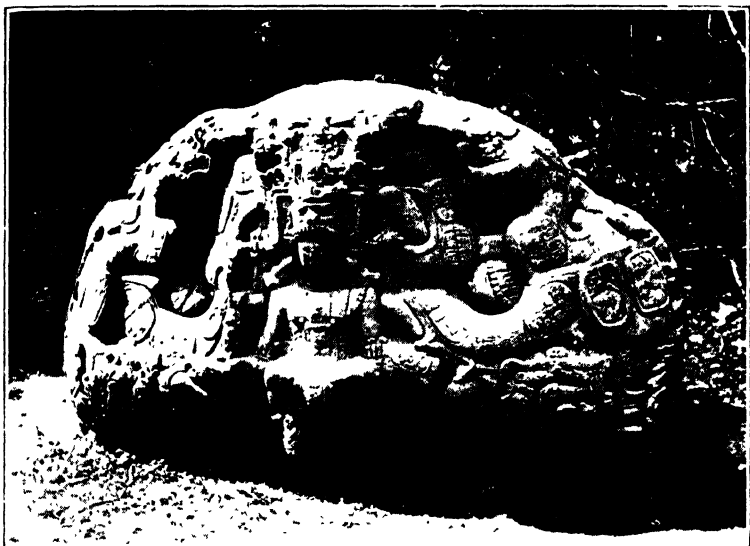
The natives in the vicinity of Quirigua are more docile than they used to be—at least so they appear. But I wonder for how long! A tragedy occurred a year or two ago, when an overseer on one of the United Fruit Company's divisions was travelling along a branch line which runs through miles of bananas. Small, low motor-driven

trucks are invariably used—handy little vehicles which travel at thirty miles an hour over the network of rails between the plantations. He was slowing down at a branch of the line when suddenly from the ambush of an irrigation-ditch sprang a number of natives, and, without a chance of defending himself, he was hacked to pieces for apparently no reason whatever.

After spending a few days in thoroughly examining the ruins, we travelled up to Guatemala City, which stands four thousand eight hundred and eighty feet above sea-level. The journey was interesting and instructive; the railroad after rising for two thousand feet crosses a desert which lies at the foot of mountains towering to the sky. It is an arid region, and the heat is terrific. Miniature trees remarkably like the dwarf Japanese species grow here; and so prolific are the giant cacti, growing to a height of quite thirty feet, that in many places the Indians have completely walled in their thatched mud dwellings by planting them around, thus forming a thorny barricade through which nothing can pass. In this region, too, it is curious to see the birds' nests like pear-shaped bags, many of them three feet in length, which hang from the single telegraph wire alongside the railroad.

The population of Guatemala to-day is approximately two million one hundred and fifty thousand, of which no less than seventy per cent are Indians speaking their native dialects. But this census can be only very approximate, as can the percentage of Indians, for there are vast tracts of territory of which very little is known, and whole regions, such as the Peten Bush, are unexplored.

It is a remarkable country. On the coast the thermometer will touch a hundred degrees in the shade; at the same time in the interior among the mountains there will be frost. But the change from tropical heat to frost is very gradual, varying with altitude. The result is that practically every fruit, vegetable and flower flourishes; it



SACRIFICIAL STONE AT QUIRIGUA. AUTHOR IN POSITION OF VICTIM

is curious to see bananas, coco-nuts, custard-apples, avacado (or alligator) pears together with strawberries, peaches, huge pears, green peas, beans, cauliflowers, carrots and potatoes. It is an ideal climate, which will grow almost anything, and the country produces some of the finest coffee in the world.

Guatemala City has always been subjected to earthquake shocks, which is not to be wondered at considering it is built on a plain practically surrounded by a chain of mountains from which four volcanoes—Fuego, Acatenango, Agua and Pacaya—rear their conical peaks amidst the clouds. The volcano Agua is supposed to be extinct; the other three are active. In the early morning light the scenery from the capital is most impressive.

We were received with the greatest courtesy by the Government officials; everything they could do to help us they did, and we made up our minds we would explore some of the thousands of square miles of jungle and mountain which lie between Guatemala and the Pacific coast, where there are still many strange Indians, secretive and shy, who rarely if ever leave their strongholds. We were informed there were tribes who not only have a language of their own, but one which resembles no tongue known to-day.

Before leaving the city we were most courteously received at the palace by the late President, General José Maria Orellana, a man of delightful personality, with whom we had several talks.

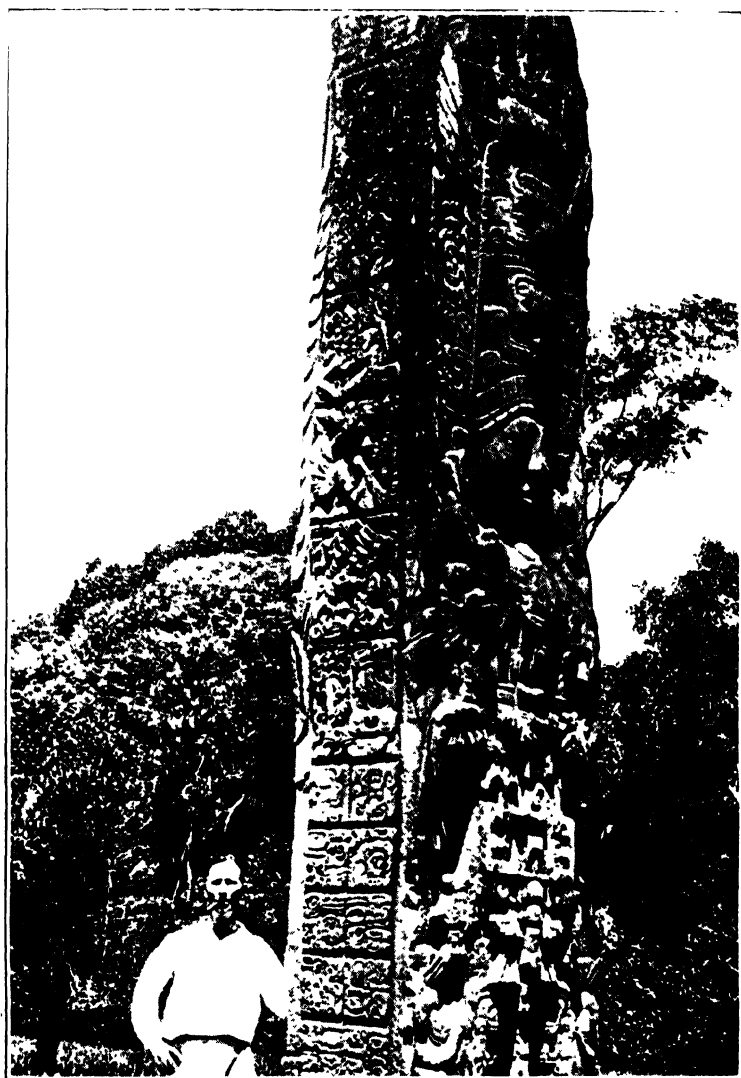
A fact which struck us was the sincere friendship of the Guatemalan people to Britons. The President himself told us how the natives esteem and admire the British because of their personal qualities. He also paid a high tribute to our machinery, and stated that during the next few years much of this would be needed in connection with roads and the agricultural developments of the country. He stressed that people in Great Britain would find the

investment of capital safe and remunerative there, as the new laws of that country safeguarded the employment of capital in loans and mortgages. And my personal feeling is that investment of money in industrial enterprises of Guatemala and other Central American Republics would be far more secure than even in a country like Great Britain, judging by the colossal depreciation and the virtual extinction of capital values in many companies, as shown by the London Stock Exchange quotations ruling at present.

There was one point on which we found the Government and people very keen; and that was to see more British tourists visit their country. And I unhesitatingly state that I cannot imagine anything more wonderful than to travel through Guatemala. I have never in any part of the world seen finer scenery, and—which is a blessing—it is very inexpensive. A three-months' tour here would cost considerably less than three months on the Riviera or in any other fashionable resort in Europe. Why must people year after year continue to go to Cannes and Monte Carlo? All the majority get for their money is the privilege of rubbing shoulders with the outcasts of society, an extreme in artificiality and fashion, and the sycophantic bowing and scraping of a host of menials who do it simply for the *douceur* they receive. Tongue in cheek, they look upon the American and English visitors with contempt.

We remained for some days in the capital making arrangements for our expedition completely across the country to the Pacific Ocean; and finally at daybreak one chilly morning (and it is surprising how cold it can be at an early hour) we started.

Loaded up with impedimenta we left in a motor-car on the first part of our journey and stopped at San Raphael, a favourite spot for honeymooners. The house was little more than a shed, but had a wonderful flower-garden. Our



IMMENSE STELA SHOWING SERIES OF DATES IN MAYA GLYPHS

next halt was at the village of Mixco, where we alighted to watch the church service, in the middle of which there was a series of explosions. Several men outside were firing maroons and rockets to awaken the saints so that they might hear the supplications of the worshippers. The majority attending the service were Indian women, all dressed in white.

We travelled on to the ancient Spanish town of Antigua. The ruins here are remarkably interesting, particularly the cathedral of San Francisco and the ruined monastery. It is sad to see the ravages wrought by the intermittent earthquakes; the domes and walls of the cathedral with their beautiful sculpturing have fallen, and the relentless hand of time is slowly obliterating these grand edifices.

The air is singularly clear. We climbed to the dome, where a wonderful view was obtained, the huge volcano Agua towering to the skies above us, grimly menacing—the embodiment of silent strength.

In the days of its full splendour Antigua must have presented a remarkable appearance. Now gone are its glories. The ancient monastery is shattered, the roof has fallen in and the walls in many places are crumbling to dust. An hour in Antigua brings vividly home to one the realization of how ephemeral civilizations are; for only three or four hundred years ago Antigua, the ancient capital, was a great and flourishing centre.

It was very curious, and symptomatic of how little care is taken, that once decay sets in it becomes epidemic. Everything follows a well-ordered course. One would imagine that although these really beautiful buildings are now in ruins, at least the statues of the saints would be cared for. But no. There were several life-sized effigies lying about and propped against the tumble-down walls and there left to rot, one being of the Virgin Mary.

We were introduced to the priests here, who were jolly and excellent men, and lunched with them at their old

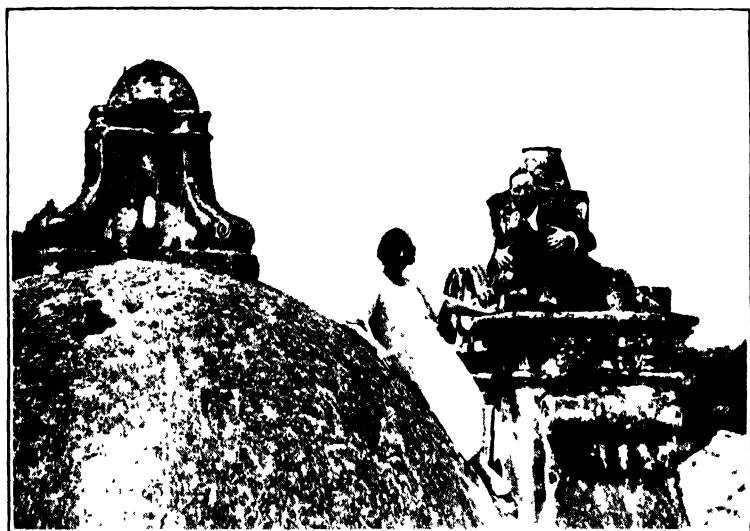
house with its glorious patio smothered in flowers and flowering vines; a tree growing in the centre was covered in a profusion of large white balls; fuchsias, arum lilies, and tree-ferns yards long were growing everywhere.

Afterwards we wandered out, and found the streets of the town alive with little Indian girls all dressed in white with long veils and orange-blossoms on their heads—they looked like miniature brides. An important ceremony was taking place—their first communion—and they had congregated from many miles around.

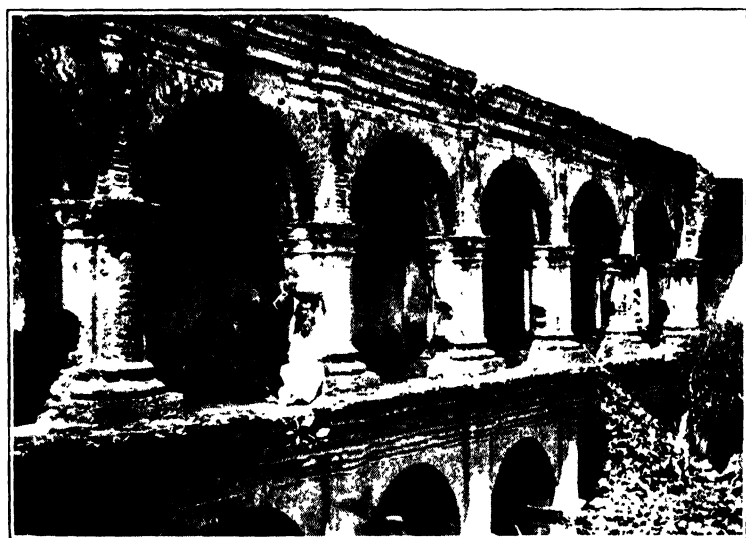
We returned to our friends the priests, whose looks of consternation when we disclosed our immediate plans were comical. They assured us it was an impossibility to travel as we intended, and by every means did their best to dissuade us. But I think both Lady Brown and I have a streak of cussedness, and the protestations that it was madness to make such a journey really strengthened our determination.

But we were not to leave Antigua without a most kindly and reverent action from our friends, who held an informal service in which we took part, praying that the Good God would bless our endeavours, and that we might be preserved from harm on our adventurous journey.

Afterwards they opened several bottles of excellent wine, and I must frankly confess that subsequently I did not care whether there was an earthquake, volcanic eruption, or a blizzard. Good chaps, those priests; they certainly endeared themselves to us, and I hope to meet them again. I should deem it a privilege to do so—but should be more careful with their vintage.



DOME OF CATHEDRAL OF SAN FRANCISCO, ANTIGUA.
VOLCANO IN BACKGROUND



THE RUINS OF THE ANCIENT MONASTERY AT ANTIGUA

CHAPTER XVI

LAKE ATITLAN—THE ZUTUHILE INDIANS—THEIR GROTESQUE CUSTOMS

WHAT a morning! Every flower, shrub, and tree jewelled as the rising sun flashed the dewdrops suspended everywhere. The volcano Agua looked ridiculously unreal, its base and the country around completely enveloped in mist and its crest rising abruptly from a woolly bed to meet the silver-flecked blue vault of the sky.

As we travelled from Antigua the little town behind us looked like a deserted city, the dome of San Francisco gleaming white, and overshadowing the clustering houses. Goodbye to our brief spell of comfort; it would have been absurd altogether to ignore the advice and information given us in Guatemala City and by the priests. We knew Central America too well to minimize the difficulties which must lie ahead.

"Something seems to tell me, Mabs," I jerked out, the bumping of the car making speech difficult, "that we're going to have a devil of a time. This isn't going to be any joyride."

"Good job," she retorted. At that moment the car gave an imitation of a bucking horse as it lurched over a large boulder, and whatever else she was about to remark was extinguished as her head struck the hood of the car.

"Damn," she exploded savagely, at the same time rubbing her head while the pain made her eyes water.

"Let's have a look and see if there's any damage. You've got a nasty bump coming," I said when I had

examined the injured place. "But it's not bleeding." In spite of her pain she laughed.

"What's the joke?" I asked.

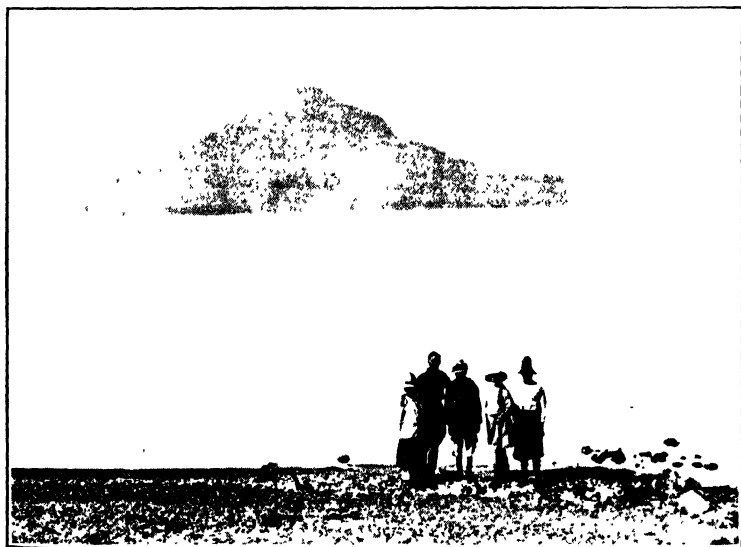
"I was just thinking that bang was perhaps a subtle hint of what's coming to us, and—stop the car!" she shouted suddenly. The driver pulled up with a jerk.

"Now what's wrong?" I asked anxiously. She pointed up the road—if road it could be called. Plodding stolidly along was something that at first sight appeared to be a walking mass of earthenware, but which, as it drew nearer, resolved itself into a native carrying on his back a collection of crude pottery bowls. In a curiously shaped contraption made in tiers he had at least fifty large pieces of earthenware of assorted shapes piled up until they towered above his head, completely dwarfing him. He appeared much astonished when we stopped him, but after some persuasion we managed to photograph this travelling store, though all the time he seemed bewildered that we should find anything strange in him and his burden. But on receiving a peso his face broke into delighted grins, and he plodded on his way. Whether he sold his wares or not, he no doubt congratulated himself on having done a good day's business.

By a series of bumps and jerks we arrived at Zaragoza, the home of the bearded Indians. These strange and shy people are the only tribe we have ever met in Central America who have a strong growth of hair on their faces. It is almost impossible to become friendly with them; their aversion to the camera is positive and cannot be overcome by persuasion or gifts. We tried stealth, but they were too cunning, and we had to admit defeat. I expect if one lived in their village, after a time it could be managed—but perish the thought! For if one spent a night in their shacks one could not complain of loneliness. My personal inclinations have never reached that altruistic state when I could turn myself into a feast for fleas, bugs, and lice; and the huts of these people are alive with such creatures.



LAKE ATITLAN. 5,150 FEET ABOVE SEA LEVEL



VOLCANO SAN PEDRO RISING FROM LAKE ATITLAN

Disgruntled we left, and some miles farther on passed through the village of Tecpan. From here we began to climb the mountains. It was a hair-raising experience, and we expected every moment to be our last. In places the bends were so acute that it was impossible to manoeuvre the car round them without backing, and once the rear wheel actually overhung the side of the track. We were compelled to get out at every sharp turn and collect lumps of rock with which we blocked the wheels to prevent the car slipping backwards. And now, lying flat, we peered over the edge. It was a sheer precipice dropping to where masses of great boulders lay fantastically piled up in the valley thousands of feet below. By luck and the skilful driving of our man we finally gained the summit, a height of eleven thousand feet, and if the travelling up had been bad, going down the other side was, if possible, worse. Eventually, however, we completely crossed the range and came in sight of Lake Atitlan, pulling up in Panajachel, a little village on the shores.

Our driver must have been a superman, fearless, without nerves and of remarkable stamina, but nevertheless the strain had told on him to such an extent that when we stopped he was in a state of collapse, and we had to help him out of the car. But a couple of stiff drinks and a meal which made up in quantity what it lacked in quality pulled him together.

"We shall have to stay here for a day or two," Lady Brown advised. "That man will crock up if we don't. Flesh and blood couldn't stand it." I agreed. There is no doubt it was entirely due to his marvellous driving that we ever reached this little town.

I shall never forget the next morning. Five thousand one hundred and fifty feet above sea-level lay Lake Atitlan, seventeen miles long, without a ripple, green-blue in colour, and completely surrounded by gigantic mountains. Rising sheer from the edge of the water were the two volcanoes

Atitlan and San Pedro, towering twelve thousand feet to the skies. Indian women in beautifully worked, brilliantly coloured costumes, and men with strangely woven coats, short pants, and skirts, were already busy doing nothing as usual among the masses of flowering plants, bushes, and trees. The sky was mottled with gold flecks—a miracle of beauty which changed continually as the sun rose higher until, as it appeared above the heights, the lake shimmered, a molten silver mirror, reflecting the volcanoes and mountains perfectly. Humming-birds and gorgeous butterflies fluttered everywhere, adding splashes of vivid colouring to the exotic scenery. The lazy drone of insects arose through the heavily scented air; the lure, the insidious lure of the tropics enervated us with its narcotic somnolence. Addicts, we revelled in the drug.

Reluctant to leave the "*dolce far niente*" yet we summoned up sufficient energy to engage a native boat, left Panajachel and crossed the lake to the village of Atitlan, the head-quarters of the Zuhutle Indians, which lies at the foot of the volcano. We could distinctly see wisps of smoke issuing from the crater; centuries ago the surrounding country was entirely devastated when it erupted. The Indians crowded round us as we landed, but it took us some time to become friendly with them. It was again the confounded cameras they were terrified of, but with difficulty we overcame their fear and suspicion, and in the end learned much of their customs, legends, and ceremonies.

Seen from the lake their homes look like a collection of gigantic beehives. The smooth, thatched roofs rise to a point and the lower parts are built of the large black volcanic boulders which lie thickly covering the ground for miles around. Enclosing each small dwelling is a wall constructed of the same stones. Atitlan is different from any other Indian village I have ever seen.

Separated from each hut by a space of about twenty-five



WITH THE NATIVES AT PANAJACHEL. NOTE THE MEN'S SKIRTS

feet was a curious oblong structure which looked like a vault, with an entrance hole three or four feet in height. On careful examination of these buildings their sides were found to be made of the same volcanic stones, with all the interstices filled in with mud, and the roof of closely woven thatch. By no stretch of the imagination could we guess what these strange places could be. Within every one we noticed that at some period a fire had been lit.

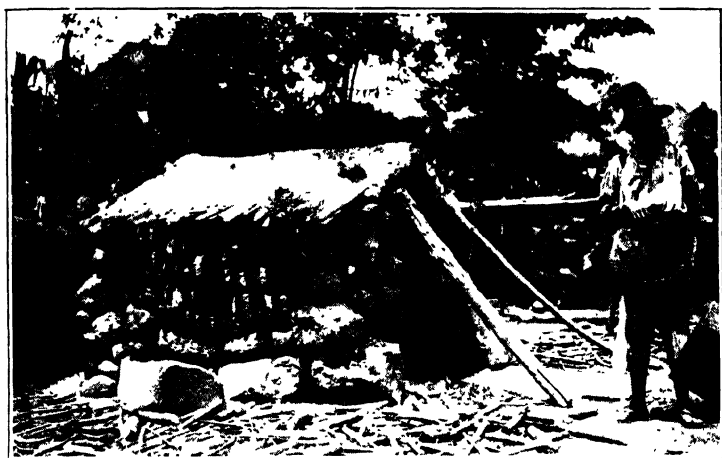
The Zutuhile are extremely reticent, and will usually leave unanswered even the most simple questions, so that it takes hours of patience and beating about the bush to learn anything. But in the end we solved the mystery. These low buildings were erected and used for the specific purpose of child-birth. They are called *Temescal* (hot bath). At the time when actual labour commences, the Indian woman enters one of these huts accompanied by a "medicine-woman." After an incantation and secret rites performed by the latter, a fire is made inside of a certain wood that glows fiercely but gives off no smoke, and immediately after lighting this (which she and nobody else must do) the medicine-woman leaves the prospective mother alone within and closes the door. Naturally, the heat inside becomes terrific, and in this super-incubator the child is born; whereupon the mother opens the door and walks out quite unconcerned, carrying her infant in her arms, and continues her ordinary work.

The Indians have a Chief and Council who all dress in a native costume of office. This costume is surprising, as showing that although we moderns from time to time create fresh fashions and styles, yet in the majority of instances they are but survivals or repetitions not only of what has gone before but of what is actually adopted to-day and being yet worn in remote parts of the world by extremely primitive tribes. It can be plainly seen in the photograph that the eight members of the Zutuhile Indian Council are dressed in an intricately woven type of jumper, short

baggy trousers, with their heads swathed in bandanas. In other words, almost a replica of what one will see the youth of both Great Britain and the United States wearing, especially at the seaside during the summer; and, except for the bandanas, almost the identical costume worn in the country at other times of the year—plus-fours and pull-over. The costume of the Chief, too, with the exception of the hat, bears a strongly marked similarity to the mayoral robes worn by their worships in England, even to the chain of office; and his dignity is no whit less.

At Panajachel the majority of the men wear a short woven plaid skirt, analogous to the national Scottish dress worn by the Highland regiments. Like most of the Indian races, they are short in stature though very muscular, and are the survivals of a great civilization which thousands of years ago thickly populated Central America.

The Zutuhile Indians, apart from medicine men and women, have witches of whom they go in terror. Like most primitive tribes their lives are ruled by fanatical superstition. As previously mentioned, their village lies at the foot of the volcano Atitlan, and they believe that within the depths of the volcano dwells a terrible goddess who at certain periods becomes enraged and then wreaks her vengeance on the world—which to their limited intelligence is very proscribed and confined to the borders of their own territory. One of their most dreadful rites, practised until quite recently, entailed the climbing, with immense labour, to the mouth of the crater, and the hurling of children, selected by the witches and medicine-men, into the molten depths, to appease the wrath of the goddess; their belief being that disaster can be averted only by feeding her rapacity with the most beautiful of their children. This offering of human life has, I believe, been nominally stopped; but I have suspicions that the horrible practice is still continued in secrecy.



TEMESCAL (HOT BATH) IN WHICH ZUTUHILE WOMEN BEAR THEIR CHILDREN



THE AUTHOR WITH THE ZUTUHILE INDIAN COUNCIL

It was impossible to obtain any definite knowledge of other sacrifices and ceremonies practised by the Zutuhile, but there are undoubtedly several of which they are too terrified to speak. In the surrounding country on the sides of the hills there are many ancient stone altars, and we found several of these covered in the blood of chickens and turkeys; evidence of the victims was afforded by the feathers strewn around. But what mystified us was that although some altars were blackened and thickly coated with blood we could see no feathers, nor bones nor any sign of what had been sacrificed here to their gods. It left us wondering. . . .

The marriage ceremony of these Indians, which would appear to be unique, is very simple, and, as far as I know, bears no resemblance to that of any other native tribe. During the day the women and girls walk down from the village to the lake-side to fetch water, carrying on their heads large two-handled earthenware pots, rather crude, which they make themselves. An Indian boy, having taken a fancy to a certain girl, watches until she goes to the lake, whereupon he hides among the stone boulders beside the path she must travel on her return journey, and here he patiently waits. The girl, having filled her pot, places it upon her head and unsuspectingly commences her journey back to the village. When she arrives opposite the spot where the boy is hidden, he rushes out, and seizing the pot dashes it to fragments on her head. If she remains standing there it is considered a public betrothal; if she runs away it signifies a refusal.

The marriage itself is very simple—no feast follows; she goes off with the youth and that is the end of the matter. By tribal custom they are married.

The smashing of the earthenware pot over the girl's head appeared to us to be a very violent and most dangerous method of expressing one's love, and we were curious to

know if the girls were ever stunned or had their heads cut open. But their skulls must be abnormally thick, for we were assured that this never happened; and the more fragments the pot shattered into, the greater the love of the youth was supposed to be.



SCENE OF ZUTUHLE MARRIAGE CEREMONY



WATERFALL OF 900 FEET. ATITLAN

CHAPTER XVII

DESCONSUELA, LAIR OF THE BANDITS—CAUGHT IN AN AWFUL
STORM—MY COMPANION IS WITHIN AN ACE OF DEATH

THE Zutuhile—chiefly the women—were greatly intrigued with Lady Brown; it was her high-boots and breeches that fascinated them. They could not really determine whether she was man or woman. We, of course, look upon the Indian garb as strange, but are inclined to forget what we must look like to them. I always feel that they show a courtesy which would be an object lesson to ourselves.

As we were leaving they asked from what part of the lake we had come. We explained we were from England, but mystified, they shook their heads. We asked them if they had heard of America; again they shook their heads in solemn negation. We thought perhaps they might have heard of the Great War, but, like the Maya Kekchi, of this also they were in total ignorance. The world meant nothing to them outside their village, and perhaps this accounts for the peace we found there.

The Zutuhile are a perfectly happy and contented people; nature has endowed them lavishly with fruit and vegetables, and they have their own cattle and fowls. We left them with a feeling that, after all, their life, free from care and worry, must surely be an ideal one.

Later we circumnavigated Atitlan, and discovered that Indians in greater or lesser numbers lived all round the lake. They are great anglers and have a passion for fishing, although I think it is the catch and not the sport that appeals to them. Like other primitive peoples, their lives from birth to death are mainly occupied in providing

food for themselves. They have evolved a fish-trap very much like the old-fashioned eel-trap still used in the rivers and dykes in England. But their captures never vary, I believe, from about a dozen to twenty fish not more than four inches long, exactly the same shape as goldfish but blackish in colour; these when cooked were to my taste most unsavoury, and had the flavour of mud—and smelly mud at that.

We should have liked to take the path of least resistance and laze here for a time, but although it needed all our will-power we tore ourselves away from this Utopia. In spite of our keenness to travel on, the prospect of interminable hours in the car being bumped, banged and bruised, did not exactly fill us with elation. It was our first experience of a mechanical expedition.

Immediately after leaving Atitlan we commenced to rise, the road winding along the base of a cliff hundreds of feet high, and, without warning, on rounding a rocky buttress we came on one of the most spectacular waterfalls I have ever seen. Flashing in the morning sunlight, from the top of the precipitous cliffs the roaring waters fell sheer for over nine hundred feet into a yawning chasm within a yard of us. It was superb—another of nature's miracles—while the vegetation covering the sides of the cliff, perpetually watered and sprayed by the cataract, was super-luxuriant and strikingly green in comparison with the surrounding country.

Hereafter our journey became very arduous. Having crawled along for a further eighteen to twenty miles we started to climb a great mountainous range. The track here was indescribable, a succession of holes and boulders. Landslides which had fallen and blocked the road caused continual delays and a great amount of labour in clearing a passage for the car. On several occasions, owing to wash-outs, we thought we were stranded, but by dint of hard work we dragged branches and old rotting trunks of



ZUTUHILE VILLAGE AND VOLCANO ATITLAN

trees from where they had fallen by the side of the track, and these, together with armfuls of bush, we laid down for the car to pass over.

After hours of obstructions and difficulties we arrived in a wild and desolate country among the heights, known to the Indians as "Desconsuela" (Place of Affliction or Desolation); and suddenly on rounding a bend we received an unpleasant surprise. On our right was a precipice falling sheer for some thousands of feet; on the other side steep mountain slopes came right down to the track. Across our path in front of the car a large tree, recently felled, lay effectually barring our progress. Our driver did not hesitate. "Guns!" he shouted, and his tone was sufficient. We drew our '45's ready for the bandits, for it was plain that the tree had been felled for a sinister purpose—to impede laden mule-trains that cross the mountains here. Although we could not see them, men who would stop at nothing were watching close at hand among the boulders and vegetation. We leapt from the car and fired into space—a warning that we were fully armed—but the fight we expected never materialized. Faces peered momentarily from behind a mass of boulders ahead, then vanished, as, taking no chances, we fired at them. Whether our bullets found their mark we never knew. While Lady Brown stood guard, the driver and I removed the tree-trunk; we saw no more of the bandits and continued our journey unmolested.

This trail is the only means of passing from several towns in the west across the mountains to a point where it joins up again with that road leading ultimately to Guatemala City. Woe to the mule-trains that travel here unless a number of armed men accompanies them! To attempt the journey alone would be madness. It is simple for the bandits, safe in the knowledge that retribution will never follow, to murder unsuspecting travellers. In this vast, desolate place, with precipices dropping sheer for thousands

of feet, dense vegetation and uninhabited areas for hundreds of miles, it is the easiest thing in the world for one person or a dozen people to disappear; and even if they were found it would be only as an unrecognizable heap of flesh and bone lying at the bottom of a precipice. An accident—which can so very easily happen here! These human vultures should be exterminated, though by reason of their inaccessibility the process of destruction would be very difficult. As it is, they are a constant menace to the mule-trains. Protected by the natural ambush of the boulder-strewn mountain-side, without being seen they shoot—and shoot to kill: dead men tell no tales. I have often wondered why they let us pass without firing a shot.

A few miles farther on we saw that marching squadrons of cloud which had been advancing from the direction of the Pacific were banking in an ominous mass over the mountain tops.

“It looks bad—eh?” And as Lady Brown spoke the heavens were split by a ribbon of flame, and simultaneously with a reverberating roar of thunder the rain poured down. In a few minutes the trail became a cataract; branches of trees, rotten wood, other debris and small stones were carried in the rush of water. In our anxiety to find at least slight shelter from the raging storm we flung discretion aside, and, risking it, jerked onwards. We were doing well and still climbing when, with a thud, the car sank down and we knew that our journey, for that day anyhow, had come to an abrupt end. The heavy rain and torrent swirling down the trail had either softened or washed out the surface, and the front wheels had descended into a water-hole. We jumped out and crouched beneath an overhanging rock—a poor shelter at best, but—any port in a storm. At this altitude the cold was intense; the rain, now a deluge, hissed down with increasing violence, a hurricane of wind that had sprung up swept the passes, and the roar of the thunder shook the mountains. With

the elements gone mad around us we had forgotten, in our drenched and shivering state, the one great danger. Suddenly there rose above the storm a smashing, rending noise and a series of dull booming thuds, and a boulder, loosened from the mountain-side by the torrential rain, crashed onto the trail a few yards away, sending a water-spout flying in its passage and bounding over the edge of the precipice to fall thousands of feet into the valley below. In its wake followed an avalanche of smaller boulders, stones and earth. It was a breathless moment, for had the great rock struck the car it would have shattered it to pieces, and by its weight and momentum surely carried it over the side, leaving us stranded in that wild spot without any means of returning except on foot—a disaster, complete and absolute. Besides which, a necessary amount of food, our cameras and other articles would have been irrevocably lost; the destruction of our entire photographic outfit alone would have been a tragedy.

Dusk fell, and we knew the worst. There we were and there we would have to stop until daylight. Our only consolation was that it could not be called monotonous, wondering every moment what was going to happen next. When finally it became pitch dark it was fascinating to watch the lightning throwing out in bold relief the pin-nacled mountain-tops, escarpments, and precipices. The thunder still roared and the rain poured down incessantly, while with every hour the cold increased until we were chilled to the marrow. It was hell—without the fire; Lady Brown with her teeth chattering swore she would give twenty dollars for a hot drink.

It must have been one o'clock in the morning when, abruptly as it had started, the storm ceased. Masses of cloud, riven and rent by the thunder and lightning, broke up and began to fall, settling in the valleys below, and before another hour had elapsed the stars were shining from a clear cold sky. But we passed some of the longest

hours I ever remember before the first streaks of dawn showed, when—God be praised!—somehow or other we managed to get a fire going with the aid of a tin of lubricating oil, and must each have drunk a quart of boiling tea before we began to feel the blood circulate and a little glow of warmth stealing through us. We were nearly atrophied with cold, and I don't believe we could have survived many more hours at that altitude under the same conditions.

Our man was even more seriously affected than we were; he was in a pitiful condition, shaking with ague, his face drawn and haggard. It was not until the sun rose and blazed down on the mountains that we could begin the work of freeing the car from the confounded hole into which the front wheels had plunged. In the end we managed to get it out, though it took us three hours, and by that time we had passed from our half-frozen condition of the night to the other extreme, and were sweating freely. As the sun poured down, the steam from the wet rocks and sopping vegetation swirled up in a cloud, and we could watch it rising to the crest of the mountains.

"What a marvellous view there must be from the top!" Lady Brown exclaimed.

"We'll climb up there if you like," I half-jokingly suggested.

"That's just what was in my mind—why not? It can't be much more than a thousand feet."

Seeing she was really serious I pointed out that distances were very deceptive in the mountains and at this altitude, and that it was probably a great deal farther than we thought; neither would the going be as easy as it appeared. But in the end, indicating to the driver our intentions, we started.

At first all went well, though, as I had guessed, one could not gauge distance, and we had climbed quite a thousand feet and were still some way from the top when we found the exertion after our night of exposure was telling on us

badly, and the apparent ease of the ascent as seen from below was a delusion. We had come to a nasty part and found an extremely difficult corner had to be negotiated. Being no Alpinist I should have liked to have turned back; but instead, pressing close to the face of the rock, I managed, inch by inch, to creep round. I was so absorbed in this hair-raising business that I had not noticed Lady Brown was following me with her hand through my belt until I had one foot planted on the rock beyond and with both hands had fortunately secured a firm hold on a solid projection. It was then that the mass on which my companion was standing gave way with a deep rumble, and she hung for the space of seconds over the brink of a precipice. Luckily she was gripping my belt tightly; for a moment—an eternity—I swayed under the shock of her weight. It seemed that nothing could save us.

"For God's sake try to find a foothold," I gasped; and by a miracle she did, and so relieved the strain upon me.

Somehow—I shall never know how—we reached a solid ledge on which we both collapsed exhausted. I patted her shoulder.

"Mabs, that's one of the nearest shaves we've ever had." She looked down and shuddered. Far below, the trees in the valley, owing to the immense distance, appeared so diminutive as to be almost indistinguishable.

Hating to give in, we continued climbing until we gained the highest point, which is over thirteen hundred feet up, and from there looked down on the world. In one ravine the sun was shining on rolling billows of cloud which looked exactly like the white rollers of a storm-swept sea, except that their motion from this great height was almost imperceptible. By a strange phenomenon other valleys were clear of vapour. In the far distance we could distinctly see the cone of a volcano standing like a sentinel clean-cut against the horizon; later we learned it was on the Mexican border, over a hundred miles away. The

Pacific Ocean, between sixty and seventy miles off, was clearly visible. Not a sound broke the silence.

At this height we discovered that our breathing became affected, our lips turned bluish and we both suffered from nausea and giddiness, probably a penalty for our heavy smoking. So ill in fact did we feel that it became imperative we should descend to a lower altitude; but we found that to climb down was even more difficult than our arduous ascent. It was accomplished somehow, with the loss of a certain amount of skin from our shins, plus innumerable contusions.

As an entomologist I was greatly interested to notice that at a height of over seven thousand feet were numbers of the "Painted Lady" butterfly (*Pyrameis Cardui*); at over eight thousand feet we saw many of that British rarity, the "Camberwell Beauty" (*Vanessa Antiopa*), and at nearly eleven thousand feet we found the "Grizzled Skipper" (*Hesperia Malvoe*) which occurs on chalk hills in Europe. At an altitude of over eleven thousand feet we came across the "Bordered White Moth" (*Burpalus Piniaria*), so commonly seen flying in the bright sunshine in most English pinewoods during June. Strange to say, we saw no animals in this region; it seemed to be absolutely deserted not only by all furry creatures but also by members of the reptile family. Stranger still, in spite of the fact that butterflies were in abundance, after a height of seven thousand feet we did not see a bird.

Desconsuela was indeed well named.

CHAPTER XVIII

OUR NIGHT IN THE HOME OF THE BANDITS—THE QUICHÈ INDIAN COUNTRY—OUR DISCOVERIES THERE

ON reaching the car again we discussed with the driver what we should do. Before the storm the road had been bad; now it was in a terrible condition. However, we all came to the conclusion that it was better to proceed, and slowly we crawled along, the gradient becoming steeper and the track more impossible every minute. Had we taken the trouble to walk ahead for a few hundred yards we might have saved ourselves a lot of time, for, shortly, when we had got that distance, the road appeared to end in a cul-de-sac which turned out to be caused by a landslide which had probably occurred on the previous night, and had obliterated and completely blocked the trail. Argument was useless—there was only one thing to do, and that was to begin at once the hazardous work of crawling back down that evil road. It must not be thought we preferred the car to travel stern first—it was a matter of *force majeure*, as it was quite impossible to turn round. Again thanks to the remarkable driving of our man, who had to reverse all the way, just as darkness fell, when we were near the foot of the mountains, we reached a few dilapidated huts which I could not remember passing; in the dusk we must have lost ourselves and struck another trail. Here, in the most miserable of abodes we found shelter. We were worn out and desperate for sleep. Climbing into a hammock Lady Brown murmured drowsily,

“Thank heaven to lie down! I’ll need no rocking.”

“I know that, and you won’t sleep, either,” I replied

grimly. Something in my voice made her sit up so quickly that she nearly fell to the floor.

"What d'you mean?"

"I mean that unless I'm very much mistaken we are in the village that those swine came from who felled the tree across the trail and tried to hold us up. There'll be no sleep for us to-night—we'll have to lie here with our guns handy."

"Are you joking?" she asked anxiously.

"Not on your life. It's no joke; and if anybody comes inside that door the best thing to do is to shoot quick and enquire after."

They say that somewhere about four in the morning life is at its lowest ebb; and by the time the day broke ours had done its ebbing. We were so dog-tired we could hardly climb into the car, and our wretched driver was in the same state. The surly inhabitants of the village, judging by the look on the faces of the few we saw, were, I am sure, just as glad to see the back of us as we were to see the last of them.

After our previous experience the road we were now on was a smooth highway in comparison, and after running for a few miles we stopped and had a much-needed nap. This, with a good meal and stiff drink after we woke, pulled us together, and we continued our journey over more mountainous country until, dropping down to the lowlands on the other side, late in the evening we ran into the great Quichè Indian town of Totonicapan.

Over forty thousand Indians live here. We had only just reached the town when our driver crocked up and had a severe heart attack (fortunately not of long duration) due no doubt to the strain of driving and the exposure he had undergone during our dreadful night high up in the hills.

Apart from the human interest of the town the chief object of note was the brilliant-hued cloth woven by the women. It is extremely beautiful; the most vivid

colours, which one would think must clash, when woven together blend in perfect harmony.

Twenty miles on from here we came to Chichicastenango, where there still remains the priestly clan of the Quichè. What a great race they must have been in the remote past! Evidence of this is still to be found throughout the immense territory adjoining, where there are wonderfully sculptured stones, burial mounds, and ruins which would intrigue all those interested in ancient civilizations.

Some distance away at the town of Aguacatan a river emerges from the bowels of the earth through a great cavern in the rocks, and here are monoliths, though the erosion of time has played havoc with their sculpturing. Farther in the interior of the Quichè country between the Indian villages of Cagul and Ilom, the last king of the Quichè, Tecum-Umane, is said to have concealed the vast treasure of the Indians at the time of the Spanish Conquest. The history in regard to this is far more circumstantial than the far-fetched tales one is usually regaled with. I am inclined to a belief in its existence by reason of certain data I obtained, and have a strong suspicion that there are living at the present time several higher adepts of the Quichè who actually know where the treasure was stored. But their belief that the wrath of the gods would be visited upon them if they disclosed it is so inflexible that no bribery, torture or anything else in the world would wring from them the secret.

The ancient priesthood, which is hereditary from father to son, still exists and retains the language used some thousands of years ago. It is an interesting fact that just as Christians look for the return of the Christ, so the Quichè Indians expect their god to appear in the near future. Comparatively recently a native arrived—whence, no one knew—and claimed to be He; he was accepted by the witches and the Indian theocracy. He went through the country in state, carried on a ceremonial chair, and the

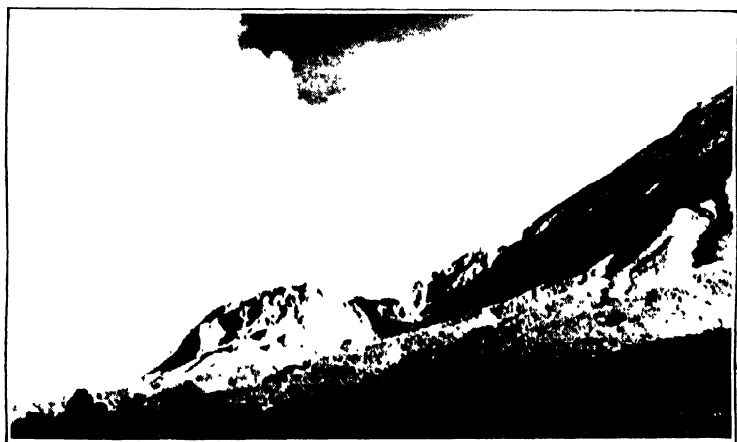
Indians declare that he performed miracles, raising the dead, restoring sight to the blind and curing the deformed. As the news spread throughout the country the Indians flocked round him in their thousands, fixed in their belief that he was their long-expected God. There is no doubt that they were on the point of rising to assert their independence and rule the country, which would have resulted in very serious consequences, when the Government adopted strong measures, averted the danger by arresting him, and lodged him in gaol. There he died.

The fact that we had lived for years among Indian tribes stood us in good stead. We had grown to understand their temperaments, and by diplomacy we gained the confidence of the natives. They became very friendly towards us, and by patient delving we unearthed a wealth of surprising information.

I wonder how many people there are to-day who suspect the actual existence of a place where are hidden wonderful painted scenes on stucco depicting the ancient ceremonies of the Quichè down to the time of the Conquest—records which for centuries have been preserved inviolate? So religiously has the secret been kept, and so difficult of access is this teocalli, that the Conquistadores were never aware of its existence.

Every year to this cryptic place the priests take those who are chosen for initiation, that they may be shown and taught to revere the wonders of their ancient civilization. Before a Quichè Indian can be fully received into the priesthood, I believe he has to pass through some terrifying ordeals, and only a very small percentage have the nerve to survive one particularly gruesome and agonizing test to its finality.

Owing to the friendliness of the people we were able to examine and photograph their sacrificial stone. It is of course very weatherworn, but even now the figure of the squatting deity is quite plain, holding in the left hand a



1. QUICHÈ SACRIFICIAL STONE.

2. VOLCANO OF SANTA MARIA

human head, while in the right it grasps the sacrificial knife. According to the Indians the age of this stone is immense, dating back several thousand years B.C. In another locality which we explored there are two stone idols, one undoubtedly being the Goddess of Fecundity, the other a square crouching figure, the details relating to which we could not obtain. But though the ages have played a certain amount of havoc with this—the work of a great artist—the face still gives the impression of bestial ferocity, inexpressibly cruel. It gave Lady Brown and myself the same reaction—horror; and we could readily understand how superstitious Indians, brought before this god of death, would collapse in abject fear. This is where the difference between modern and ancient sculpture strikes me so forcibly; there is something vivid and real in the ancient carvings of both the Maya and Quichè Indians—the sculptors were able to convey a living meaning which modern art just fails to reach. It is the difference between life and death.

The Quichè country would well repay intensive exploration. In the direction of the great Peten Bush there are tracts which are practically unknown. The whole country is redolent of an antiquity so great as to give one a feeling of the hopelessness of attempting to pierce the veil of ages that enshrouds the history of the great race, a nation numbering possibly millions, that lived here long before the birth of Christ.

We were reluctant to leave the Quichè country—there was so much that intrigued us; but we passed on until we arrived at Quezaltenango, whence we travelled again through wonderful scenery. The road follows the banks of the Samala River which cuts through the middle of a valley and foams over great boulders against a background of mountains.

Eventually we reached the town of Zunil, almost at the foot of the volcano of Santa Maria. We noticed that the

natives were more vigorous and active than in many of the villages we had passed. In our journey through hundreds of miles of country we had marvelled at the loads the Indians carried, but here anything we had yet seen was surpassed. We saw one man carrying up the mountain-side a sick Indian in a crudely made chair. Added to this weight were two children and a heterogeneous collection of household goods, and this Indian Hercules appeared to be not unduly exerting himself. He was employing the same method as that adopted by the Maya Kekchi and previously described. The native dress of these people is quite remarkable. Although they wear elaborately woven garments and hats, yet, as with the Indians of Panajachel, trousers are apparently unknown, the men covering themselves with short skirts to their knees.

From here we passed close to a great gorge where a torrent roared madly along; in many places clouds of vapour were blown into the air from fissures in the rocks, while with a strange regularity from one cavern mighty blasts of steam were shot out at intervals of three times a minute. The hills, studded with vast boulders, giant cactus, wonderful ferns and flowering plants, rose some thousands of feet on either side of the gorge. Farther on the river itself was steaming from a subterranean spring of sulphurous boiling water that poured into it. Immense forces must be pent up below the surface of the earth in this region, of which Santa Maria acts as the safety-valve.

We had by now arrived nearer to the volcano. It was a ruthless-looking brute, an embodiment of overwhelming might, and was in a state of considerable activity, throwing out columns of smoke and steam. We determined to spend a day or two here. At night Santa Maria was even more impressive than during the day. The smoke and steam were illuminated by the subterranean fires, and the hot glow of the molten lava could plainly be seen as it flowed down the sides of the volcano.



ANCIENT SCULPTURED GODS IN THE BATANECOS REGION

"You know, Mabs, one would really think the most elementary minds would recognize the folly of living here, with that terrible menace overhead."

"You forget it isn't only the Indians," she replied. "Educated people do it. We have often used the trite saying—'living on the edge of a volcano.' These poor things are actually doing it."

"True," I answered thoughtfully. "It must be the old story of familiarity breeding contempt. And it would be useless to point out to them the inevitable. Some day there'll be not one but many terrific eruptions which will annihilate them and bury the country in lava and ashes."

Shortly after we left my prophecy came true, and the press of the world has recorded the horrors which resulted when Santa Maria erupted violently, killing many of the natives and desolating the country.

CHAPTER XIX

MOMOSTENANGO, STRONGHOLD OF THE WITCHES—WE LEAVE GUATEMALA

NEAR this district (and they could not have chosen a more fitting place) is the stronghold of the witches of whom the natives go in the greatest dread. They absolutely dominate the lives of the inhabitants of this part of the country. The head-quarters of these terrible people is Momostenango. They live on the mountain-sides, and the entrances to their hovels are alone enough to strike terror into the most hardened. Strewn here are human and animal skulls, crude effigies, skins of snakes, tufts of human hair, rows of teeth and all manner of evil talismans, with the usual mystical fire ever burning. As would be expected, the appearance of these creatures is super-horrible, as are the places where they practise their demonology. After dark one can see lights dancing on the hillsides, for be it known daylight is fatal to their diabolical rites. In the dead of night the Indians creep through little-known trails to visit the wizards, who are expert, among other things, in their knowledge of certain obscure poisons. Many a man and woman in this country dies through a mysterious agency; no wonder they fear these terrible people, whose power is paramount.

From here to San Sebastian our journey was more or less uneventful. This town is the head-quarters of the Batanecos Indians. Both men and women are naked to the waist—in fact a little further. They are the finest-looking type of Indian I know in Guatemala, many of the younger women and girls being quite beautiful.



LADY BROWN WITH BATANECOS INDIAN WOMEN

The antiquity of the country is evidenced by the enormous monolithic stones which are to be seen here. We found one squatting god with the face of an ape or jaguar—erosion had made it difficult to distinguish which. Another was carved in the form of a giant toad; while yet a third was undoubtedly a crouching jaguar, with the fangs bared, very much like some of the figurines we excavated in the ruined Maya city of Lubaantun in British Honduras. This last figure must have weighed many tons.

The natives throughout the district were very shy, and at first we had great difficulty in photographing them; but in the end all was well, and we promised to return after we had explored the adjoining country.

We journeyed quite a distance into the interior from San Sebastian, and then proceeded on foot through the bush. In one place we almost tumbled over the top of something buried in the vegetation which at first appeared to be a large conical stone. On clearing away the bush and layers of rough disintegrated lava, it rapidly took the form of the upper part of an immense stone god. Evidently, during an eruption in the long-distant past it had become nearly buried in the lava flow. We were able to clear it sufficiently to obtain an outline of the face and folded arms, but this god must be a colossus; the great bulk is deep in the earth—how far down it was impossible for us to discover.

On our return to San Sebastian we were given quite a reception by the Indians. In our honour their local band mustered, and we were treated for over an hour to a weird musical entertainment on a mirimba and other strange instruments, in the making of which they had shown great ingenuity. Their craftsmanship in this, and also in the weaving of baskets and cloth, shows a considerable skill, in direct contradistinction to the conditions in which they live and their pagan lack of clothing.

The following day Santa Maria was very active, throwing

high into the air intermittent bursts of dense smoke which frequently obscured the sun. We determined to beard the lion. Our intentions were excellent, but we overlooked the fact that we were unequipped for climbing the steep sides and jagged cliffs of lava, which, before we had proceeded far, mutely showed us the absurdity of our scheme. The volcano was one too many for us. Perhaps it was just as well, for at best it would have been a long and arduous climb which might easily have ended in disaster, and in any case there was not much to be gained.

Foiled in this attempt, we struck out in another direction where a few isolated Indians were living in a little valley. They were a subdued and timid people with very little clothing, very little of anything—and very dirty. They seemed without exception to be suffering from an eye disease as well as the usual ulceration which appears to be prevalent among so many tribes.

We arrived in time to witness a depressing sight. A pathetic little procession was winding along to their place of burial, one of the women carrying on her back a tiny, crudely-made coffin, evidently that of her dead baby, while several of the others held pots of burning herbs. Wherever we have been there is always the eternal story—how needlessly cruel and illogical is Nature.

Close to this valley we found a river rising in a ravine near the base of the volcano. Lava frequently flows down and forms a dam, behind which the waters of the river pile up until the pressure is so great that it bursts the barrier, and a raging hot torrent thunders through a gorge carrying everything before it; even huge volcanic rocks are swept down in the irresistible flood.

An increasing irritation indicated that as usual when on foot in the bush we were smothered in ticks, and we were glad to get back to San Sebastian and clean ourselves of these pests. I have always found the best remedy is to rub oneself down with kerosene—that is if the skin will



GIGANTIC STONE GOD : ITS BULK BURIED IN VOLCANIC SAND



DRY RIVER-BED : ITS WATER PENT UP BY LAVA

stand it. Although I have been gratuitously advised of many methods of anointing oneself as a preventive, I have yet to find a successful one. I well remember an occasion when I was about to trek through a region of bush and jungle known to be infested with these man-eating parasites. I had a brain-wave, and conceived the idea that if I smeared myself all over with mercury ointment, this would be an effectual barrier against ticks. It was a brilliant scheme. Not a single insect dined upon me; but I had overlooked one important point—the danger of mercury. The result was that I had a dose of mercurial poisoning, and after that experience now surrender to the ticks.

As our journey through Guatemala was only of an exploratory character, and other Republics had to be visited and a vast distance covered before we reached our objective, Panama, although months could be profitably spent in investigating this region we left San Sebastian early next morning.

A few miles farther on we came to a tract of country absolutely bare of vegetation, stripped clean by countless millions of locusts, which had left the growing corn nothing but seven-foot stalks with not a vestige of green on them. All the natives had turned out in force and were driving the locusts into deep trenches which they had dug. The ground was alive with the insects; they must have been a foot deep, and we had some difficulty in getting through them.

Finally we reached Retalhuleu. Some miles from here are several sculptured monoliths covered in glyphs and masks, and the burial mounds nearby if excavated should yield a valuable collection of pottery and figurines.

Now commenced the last stage of our journey to the Pacific. Our heavy baggage had gone ahead, and we arrived ultimately at San José, where we were lucky in meeting a Mr. Gregory who gave us great assistance in

retrieving it and getting it to the wharf for us. The ship had arrived, but a storm was piling up, great breakers were thundering on the grey sand beach, and the surf was sending the spray quite a distance inshore.

Owing to the Pacific rollers and the shallow water no boat of any size can dock at the end of the pier here, and to reach our steamer anchored off-shore was not the simple matter it seemed, especially with a heavy sea running. From the end of the short wharf, first our luggage was let down into a barge which, groaning and bumping against the piles, rose and fell continually on the advancing rollers; Lady Brown followed and was lowered in a chair of sorts attached by a thick rope to a pulley. As she swung out over the barge which was to take us alongside our boat, she reminded me of a spider on the end of its thread. As I followed the storm broke, and, drenched to the skin, we made our way in a perfect deluge over the heaving waters to the ship. By the time we got there it was far too rough for us to go on board by the orthodox companion-ladder, so again we had to be drawn up like bundles of merchandise by means of a steel hawser, derrick, and donkey-engine.

But the epicurean dinner (or so it seemed to us) which we had that night made up for our discomforts. In half a gale of wind, a real tropical downpour and an electrical storm which was roaring hell for leather, we left for Acajutla in San Salvador.

The little two-thousand-ton coast-boats which used to ply up and down the west coast of Central America are now unfortunately almost extinct, their place being taken by twenty-thousand-ton ocean greyhounds with an orchestra, dancing and the usual attractions. (For further information see advertised luxury tours.) Luxury, I agree; but as they make Panama from San Francisco in one run, passengers miss the real atmosphere, and the primitive lives and customs of the people in the little ports along the west coast. The little old two-thousand-ton boats

stopped everywhere and anywhere, pushing their noses in wherever there was a chance of a cargo. Once on board it was "go as you please"—there were practically no restrictions.

The cabins opened out of the dining-saloon; but these were occupied by the plutocrats, the rest of the travellers being "deckers," making shift where they could.

The passengers were of every nationality under the sun. Chink, Jap and Philippino, stolid German trader, voluble Italian (in the vernacular, "Wop"), gesticulating Frenchman, nasal Yank, canny Scot and cosmopolitan Englishman—the last three all one to the natives of Central America, and collectively called "Gringos"—were represented; as were negro and half-breed. Travellers from the Latin Americas naturally predominated, and there was always a sprinkling of the ubiquitous Jew who usually had with him, besides his miscellaneous collection of trade goods, a parcel of rare and scintillating "emeralds." (I believe these can be bought in Germany for two marks a dozen.) They would disappear mysteriously in Colombia, to turn up again later when the artful natives with much secrecy would palm off on gullible tourists the "priceless" gems which had, naturally, been stolen from the mines.

I remember a man and his wife on a boat which had called at Puerto Colombia, taking me down to their state-room to show me something so remarkable that it would take my breath away. They had bought from a native (who of course had no idea of the value of what he was selling) a parcel of emeralds.

"They must be worth quite a hundred thousand dollars," the lady confided to me.

Unlocking a cabin-trunk they delved inside and produced a small tin box. Opening this, they reverently removed layer after layer of paper until finally before my expectant eyes there lay twenty sparkling pieces of glass. I had known what was coming; but really, when I heard the

price that the "ignorant" native had received for the worthless baubles I tried—but unsuccessfully—to keep a straight face, and am certain made two enemies for life.

Exceeding the credulousness and stupidity of these two dear people was a traveller who, on another occasion, astounded me when he displayed a "ten-carat ruby" he had acquired from the same place. Both the purchaser and the native who had sold him this synthetic gem had overlooked the triviality that rubies have never been found in Colombia, nor, as far as I know, anywhere in Central or South America.

As the Americans say, "There is a sucker born every minute."

In a city or hotel the ill-assorted hotch-potch of humanity usually found on these little trading-boats would have ignored one another, but, once on board, somehow they fraternized irrespective of rank and race, and became like one large family. Now and then a few of them would get quarrelsomely drunk and a fight would break out, but it was hardly ever serious.

It is sad to record that about a year later our boat came to an untimely end, sinking off the coast of lower California with a disastrous loss of life.

We had not intended to journey by sea; our original intention had been to turn on our tracks after reaching the Pacific and to travel from Guatemala overland to San Salvador; but owing to the wet season and the deluge of rain which poured down nearly every afternoon, the apologies for roads were quite impassable. We had therefore no alternative but to travel by boat from San José to Acajutla, the first port of call in the adjoining Republic.

It was only a night's run, and at five o'clock the next morning, with a clear sky and beautiful sunrise after the storm, we dropped anchor off Acajutla.

CHAPTER XX

REVOLUTION AND THE "RED LIGHT DISTRICT"—WHEN I WAS ARRESTED AND FLUNG IN GAOL

THE only means of landing at Acajutla is a repetition of the method of embarking at San José. The cargo, being of more importance than passengers, was lowered first from the ship into the waiting lighters, and as we watched this from the deck an experience I had had some years before came back vividly to my mind.

I was travelling on a small boat down the west coast. On anchoring off Mazatlan in Mexico it became known that two of the crew had died; the exact facts I never learned, but the doctor who came on board refused for some unknown reason to allow them to be buried at sea. Interminable negotiations took place between the Commandante, port officials, and the captain of the boat, the authorities at Mazatlan insisting the dead men should be brought ashore and buried there. Why they should make this a point was inexplicable, as a revolution was in full blast, and I should have thought would keep them busily engaged. But the discussion ended in the captain agreeing to the demands of the officials; the dead sailors were sewn up in canvas and the lighter came alongside. First was lowered a considerable amount of merchandise, the greater part of which was in ominously long and extremely heavy boxes. Despite their labels and the innocence of the bills of lading I strongly suspected arms and ammunition. Then followed innumerable bags of flour until the barge was piled high; after this the two shrouded bodies, and finally three or four people including myself were all slung out on the end

of a derrick and lowered to the lighter. The thought arose in my mind, as I looked at the bags of flour, the two stiff silent figures and ourselves, that here being conveyed to land together were the staff of life, the quick, and the dead.

Glad to get ashore and stretch my legs, I wandered up into the town, intrigued by the bullet-scarred houses and the number of armed citizens—save the mark; what a collection! They were of all ages; it was ludicrous to see boys of fourteen and fifteen swaggering and staggering along with ancient and decrepit rifles which, judging by their appearance, would have been more dangerous to the one who fired than to anything or anyone they were aimed at. The "soldiery" wore no shoes, and strips of tattered clothing more or less covered their bodies—considerably less than more. Across them were bandoliers filled with cartridges. I could not imagine what rifles they could be using, for the leaden bullets looked large enough to kill an elephant. Belted round the middle of the majority of the warriors were two enormous "guns"; they were a walking arsenal. They eyed me sullenly; perhaps they suspected me of some evil intention such as attempting to capture their town. Then suddenly a shot rang out, and with wild yells and whoops, pouring from the little houses and streets they ran as hard as they could to the centre of the town, where a sort of circular barricade had been erected, and I found myself entirely alone in a deserted street. It might have been a city of the dead except for the one spot where the crowd of armed men had gathered in their central stronghold.

Another shot rang out. I wondered if this could possibly be an attack, when, on turning a corner, there was the answer before my eyes. Sagging against the side of a *cantina* was one of the brave sons of the Republic, absolutely blotto. He was one of the most villainous-looking specimens of humanity I have ever set eyes on. When I first caught sight of him he was busily engaged in

ramming another cartridge home into his ancient weapon. In the middle of the operation, which in his drunken state was causing him considerable difficulty (it struck me as being exactly like an inebriated man endeavouring to fit his latchkey in the lock), he looked up and saw me. I shall never forget that face. His mouth opened in a vacuous grin; his gums were apparently vacant except for two yellow teeth in front, and those stuck out like the teeth of a walrus. His left eye squinted horribly in a struggle to reach the right. Stupidly he waved to me, then continued with the serious business of fumbling to get another cartridge into the breach. At last he succeeded, then slowly sank down until he sat propped against the wooden side of the building. Without rhyme or reason he pulled the trigger. The gun, which was held under his arm, exploded like a small cannon, and recoiling with a thud the butt of the rifle struck the wall of the *cantina*. Goodness knows where the shot went; I didn't wait to see. Stray bullets can be beastly unpleasant.

The revolution, of which as yet I had seen no sign except the aggressive display of miscellaneous armaments, was evidently only a daily pastime, for about five o'clock their interest in such things ceased. Bandoliers and rifles were discarded, but still retaining their guns in their belts the soldiers proceeded to that part of the town known as the "Red Light District." Curiosity has ever been my besetting sin; I could not resist the temptation, and I was rather glad I went. I entered a place which looked like a saloon of the bygone wild west days. Inside were a number of women in daring costume; somebody was playing a piano which was not only horribly out of tune but had several notes missing, while many of the belted and gunned warriors were jigging round with the houris of their choice. Many were already in their cups, but everyone was happy—very. I had not been in the building more than a couple of minutes before one fair, high-bosomed

damsel in a vivid scarlet gown, with a wild shriek of "Americano!" literally flung herself upon me, and I found myself whirled round in the dancing throng. That lady has imprinted herself on my memory. Paint and powder were thickly laid on her face and shoulders, as my clothing afterwards testified, and it seemed impossible that any human being could throw off such an extreme and pungent perfume, every part of her must have been drenched in it from her hair to her feet.

Suddenly she tired of the dance, dragged me to a table, and endeavoured to sit on my knee. Gently I dissuaded her. What a capacity that female had for strong liquor! Under its influence her friendliness increased. It would have made a wonderful movie picture—she was indeed the siren of the screen. Then suddenly she jumped up, seized me by the hand, and made unmistakable signs and suggestions that I should depart with her into the back regions. Although reluctant to wound her amorous susceptibilities I really could not bring myself to the point. But finally her desires (not free, I fear, from mercenary motives) were calmed down by further potions from the bottle, and not wishing to play Pericles to this hybrid Aspasia, I managed to make my escape at last. I left her in a lachrymose condition, vowing undying affection with a five-dollar bill in her hand.

I had been glad to get off the boat, but I was still more glad to get back on board. I had seen enough of the stirring life of Mazatlan during revolution.

Although I fear I am digressing, I cannot help recording what happened on this same journey when we put in at Selina Cruz, the next port. Although Mexico was in the throes of revolution, Selina Cruz, when we docked, appeared normal, and several passengers were tempted ashore despite the captain's warnings. I took my camera with me, and as usual wandered off through the town.

In an open space an entire company of soliders was

drawn up as if on parade. They presented a unique subject for the camera, dressed in every description of hat and torn clothing, and armed with ancient weapons. Their bare feet protruded from tattered nether garments which exposed considerable portions of naked legs. They were all beautifully in the view-finder, and as I squeezed the bulb of the camera a mass of hands descended upon me from behind. To my amazement I was arrested by the military authorities, and without "by your leave" or ceremony was hustled through the streets to the prison and pushed into one of the filthiest cells imaginable. Only a faint light penetrated through a small iron grating set high in the wall; the stench and heat were intolerable. And here perforce I remained.

No reason was given for my arrest, neither could I imagine how I had transgressed the law. In the evening food of sorts was pushed in, and after eating (or rather, attempting to) I spent a vile night. I soon discovered I was not alone; the filthy cell could not have been cleaned out for years, and the vermin in it must have been starving. But judging from the violent irritation of my body throughout the night, their hunger by morning was surely appeased. What would I not have given for a bath in insecticide! I thanked God when the door was suddenly flung open and what looked like an officer, with six men, indicated that I should accompany him. I lost no time in accepting the invitation, thankful under any circumstances to leave that pest-house. Solemnly I was marched through the streets and brought before the Commandante. And there my crime was explained to me.

I had insulted the dignity of the Mexican army. It was a heinous offence to photograph soldiers, and, in fact, to photograph anything during a state of war. They seemed convinced that I was a government spy. All my explanations were unavailing—it was no use. I had committed one of the gravest offences possible, and horrible visions

rose before me of losing my boat, which was to leave in the afternoon, and being confined for goodness knew how long in that pestiferous dungeon. I knew full well it was no use appealing to any consuls; as a matter of fact I believe the British official had left.

Suddenly I remembered—there was just one loophole. *Sotto voce* I intimated to the bristling and war-like Commandante that I had two cases of whisky on the boat. His uncompromising scowl changed to a beatific smile, and immediately he dismissed my guards and their officer. The sudden transformation of his entire manner was astonishing. From a prisoner of no importance to be flung into a cell, I at once became a personage of note, and his dear friend. He himself accompanied me down to the boat, followed by his guards. As we stalked along the docks I wondered what the passengers must have thought. Without delay his men went on board and removed from my cabin not merely the cases of whisky but also my trunk and everything else of which I was possessed. In spite of my expostulations all my property was carried off onto the dock, shouldered by the men and taken to the Commandancia.

Nothing I could say or do availed. I was the Commandante's dear friend—one for whom he had been looking for years—and I could not refuse to spend at least a fortnight with him! He was prepared to give me the freedom of the city and all that therein lay; and when he had reached his residence and had sampled the bottles, I realized that if I refused his brotherly love would instantly disappear, and back I should go into that cell of evil memory. There was only one thing to do—gracefully accept his courteous invitation.

The soldiery of Selina Cruz were no respecters of persons. This was brought home to me forcibly that afternoon when I had strolled out into the town. (A guard of two soldiers had been provided to accompany me for my protection.)

I noticed that three passengers from the boat had been foolish enough to come ashore again. They were within a hundred yards of the ship when, suddenly, half a dozen armed men held them up and divested them of everything at the point of the gun. Their pockets were emptied, all their money and even their passports taken. The soldiers took their hats and put them on their own heads. After this the victims, their indignation unavailing, were peremptorily ordered on board. Redress was out of the question—they had paid the penalty of their ignorance. So had I.

My stay with the Commandante turned out to be quite different from what I had expected. He kept his word and I was free of the city; and as we grew to know one another better I used to ride with him and inspect the soldiers and the defences of the town—if they could be so called. Every night other officials would drop in, and until the small hours of the morning we would play poker in the most friendly manner, the stakes—thank goodness—not being too high.

But to leave the city was impossible. Although the Commandante had a ranch and, by his own description, a really good house about twenty miles from Selina Cruz, yet to ride out would have meant almost certain death, as many lawless bands were roaming the adjacent country, so that even the Commandante was virtually a prisoner in his own town.

When the next boat called, a fortnight later, rather reluctantly I left, and ultimately reached the same port at which Lady Brown and I had now arrived.

CHAPTER XXI

A BATTLE WITH A SHARK—OUR JOURNEY TO EL SALVADOR —A REAL GAMBLE

THERE was the usual delay in leaving the ship, and as we stood looking over the side watching the lighter piled up with cargo crawling slowly towards the end of the pier, at the same time we noticed the ominous dorsal fins and long dark shapes of quite a few sharks. They were of the "shovel-nose" species which are ordinarily harmless. (The tiger-shark is altogether another creature.) Having nothing to do but while away the time, the cook appeared with a huge hook and line and about eight pounds of beef as bait, and lowered this over the side. It had scarcely touched the surface when it was grabbed by a shark. The water was so clear that we could see its mouth open, and its gulp as the mass of beef was swallowed, hook and all. As a pelican does, it gave a wriggle of pleasure, which was short-lived as the hook was driven well home. The startled and enraged fish made one wild dash which brought forth shouts for assistance from the cook; work stopped, the rattle of the donkey-engines ceased, and several stewards and seamen ran to his aid. A battle royal commenced. The shark was a really big one, and we became as excited as the fishermen as we watched. The captain, officers, and entire ship's company came crowding to the rails. Cargo to be unloaded, passengers to be put ashore—everything was forgotten in the fight.

"Go on, Johnny, pull 'is blasted 'ead off!" yelled an enthusiast. "Take no notice of Strawberry—give 'im line, you bloody fools!" raved the crew.

The atmosphere was very lurid round the fishermen, who were sweating and cursing in no uncertain fashion, while the language of a gentleman whose naked feet had been violently trodden on in the excitement was an education in itself.

"Gawd's strewth—wot price ole gut-lumber! First work 'e's done for monfs!" jeered an obvious Cockney, evoking a roar of laughter to the discomfiture of the cook.

The pandemonium was increased by advice in half a dozen languages, hurled by the "deckers" at the top of their voices. Jammed up against me was an Italian whose breath reeked of garlic. Sick of being gassed, I dug him forcibly in the ribs with my elbow as a hint that his close proximity was undesirable. His shrieking and gesticulating for a moment ceased; he glared at me ferociously, then spat somewhere or on somebody as he moved away a few inches. After that I was able to breathe more freely.

"They've got it!" shouted Lady Brown, tugging at my coat, as by brute strength the fish was hauled to the side. But she had spoken too soon. Hurling its length half out of the water in a smother of spray, the great fish dived wildly under the boat, tearing the line through the men's hands and barking the cook's knuckles against the rail. With a yell he let go, sucking hard at his fingers, to the glee of the crew and a further fusillade of strong adjectives and jeers.

"Dat fish him gone, sah!" roared a huge buck nigger; whereupon with a look of "do or die," the cook grabbed the line again and vented his wrath on the fish by straining and hauling with all his strength. It must have been fully half an hour before the monster gave in and was again brought alongside, when two men managed to get a half-hitch round its tail, attached the rope to the ship's derrick and started the donkey-engine. Slowly the shark was hauled up head downwards, swung inboard and lowered until it lay full-length on deck where it appeared played

out and lifeless—a delusion, as was quickly discovered by the crowd that swarmed round it.

The triumphant lord of the galley and several others were bending down and gloating over the creature when without warning the huge bulk came to life, lashed round with its tail and caught two of them across their legs just above the knees, sending them flying. Jumping up, one of the men, enraged, ran for a hatchet and shouting " Knock me guts out, would yer? " brought it down with all his might, intending to sever the shark's vertebræ a foot above where the monster's tail should have been—but wasn't. At that moment the fish made another convulsive movement and the blow missed, the axe burying itself in the deck and provoking howls of derision from the crowd. His next attempt, however, was more successful, and that was the end of the shark.

Only then did it dawn on everyone that there was work to do. We ourselves had forgotten that we had to go ashore, that there was such a thing as a train waiting, and that our luggage had already preceded us in the lighter. Order having been restored, we left the boat which, although we had spent only a short time upon it, had provided us with plenty of fun.

Thanks to His Excellency the President of San Salvador, who had been notified that we were arriving, we were given the freedom of the port, and here I should like to thank the officials of the Salvador Railroad for their courtesy in placing a coach at our disposal on the train, in which we left Acajutla on our journey up to El Salvador, the capital.

At Sonsonate, an important centre on the way, we were met by one of the heads of the railroad and entertained at his house to lunch. On boarding the train again, we were much amused in watching the gymnastic antics of our fellow-travellers. They climbed on top of the coaches and hung onto the sides, nobody but ourselves taking the slightest notice of them—it was their usual way of travelling.

But one man had evidently aroused the enmity of the conductor. He was standing on the footboard between two coaches, leaning well out, when an altercation took place between this official and himself, which ended in the former losing his temper completely and knocking the other man clean off the train. He fell onto the side of the line, where he rolled over and over—we were travelling very slowly, and he was obviously unhurt. As he jumped up he shook his fist and poured forth a torrent of insults which were hurled back with interest by the train official. I wondered what happened to him, as he certainly did not continue his journey by this train to whatever destination he was bound for.

Although the rains had been heavy, yet the blazing sun rapidly dried the ground, and as the train passed along the track thick clouds of brown dust smothered everything. One could have written one's name on the thin coat Lady Brown was wearing. As the perspiration ran down our faces it left lines like streaky bacon, and the dust penetrated our throats and lungs making us sneeze and cough continually, and setting up a most unpleasant irritation.

After about an hour's run from Sonsonate we came to a wonderful and awe-inspiring sight. Here the volcano San Salvador rears up to the sky, and the great lava flow commences. It was this volcano that in 1919, during a tremendous eruption, laid low El Salvador City in a series of violent earthquake shocks, while the torrent of lava which poured down the sides from the crater obliterated the country under a depth of many feet over a large area, flowing on and burying the railroad for a considerable distance. It was months before the molten stream cooled down sufficiently for the work of relaying the track to be started. The road-bed had to be hewn out from the deep lava which is now piled up on either side like the banks of a cutting.

We arrived at El Salvador that night, and were glad to

get to the hotel and still more glad of a bath. The fine dust had percolated through my clothes, but I had not known my body was as dirty as it was until, on getting out of the tub, I saw the colour of the water and the water-mark around the sides.

The capital is a delightful city; the buildings, plaza and statues remarkably fine. The greatest friendliness was extended to us by everybody, and we were agreeably surprised when we visited the Club. It is beautiful; the patio, with its perfectly trained vines and fountain playing in the centre, imposing pillars and tiled floor, completes a picture of wealth and luxury.

If anybody wants a real gamble, he can get all he wants in El Salvador. There are members of the club who will throw dice for as much as a hundred thousand dollars at a sitting. As an instance of the extremes to which Salvadorians will gamble, here may be told what happened a short time before our arrival.

A young commercial traveller came to the city and was introduced to the club; whereupon he was promptly drawn into a foursome of poker dice. The stakes were moderate to begin with, but luck was with him, and he won persistently until he found he was five hundred dollars up, when one of the men challenged him to a throw for the lot. A good sport, he accepted, and won again.

Now commenced one of the most remarkable runs of luck in the history of the club. The visitor's opponent was a very rich man, and they continued shaking. All the afternoon the gamble went on; they dined there, and later the struggle was renewed. Finally the traveller, whose income was only the salary he earned—quite small—found he was a winner of no less a sum than eighty thousand pounds, or four hundred thousand dollars. But that was not the finish. The Salvadorian refused to admit defeat, and eventually gambled his house and coffee *fincas* (plantations)—one of the finest estates in the Republic—

against what the other man had won, and again luck was with the stranger. In a day, from being in a position of comparative poverty as a salaried servant, he had become a rich and independent man. Such is life in the Republics, where all are born gamblers.

The following day we were presented to Dr. Alfonso Quiñónez Molina, the President, and found him, like His Excellency, Orellana of Guatemala, most courteous and charming. (I had met him before when he was President-Elect.) We were introduced to his only daughter, who on the previous Saturday had returned from a three-years' collegiate course in San Francisco and spoke English perfectly, and we were all photographed together in the lovely patio of the palace.

We had a long chat, and among other interesting things the President pointed out to us that although banana plantations flourished in the Republics of Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, and Panama, in Salvador the cultivation of the fruit was still in its infancy, and mentioned that on the Pacific Coast there were large areas of land especially suitable for bananas.

In the course of conversation I asked him how he viewed the fact that the sons of many leading Salvadorians were now being educated in the United States and the public schools of Great Britain, and he informed me he was certain that ultimately this would be greatly to the betterment of Salvador. But we understood from him that many more girls and youths were going to the United States than to Britain owing to the great trouble created by the British passport system. The President added that his brother-in-law was desirous of taking his whole family to England that they might be educated there, but the difficulties were so great that their plans would probably be changed.

There is no doubt that the British passport system and Alien Laws are causing a great deal of irritation to people

in other countries. Some method should be devised whereby, on unimpeachable references being submitted to the British consuls or ministers, the difficulties might be reduced. A person of position objects, I think rightly, to being placed in the same category as a pauper immigrant or a criminal. To my certain knowledge, the passport system and Alien Acts of Great Britain are reacting very badly on our trade, are losing us many friends and are certain to provoke retaliatory measures.

That afternoon we drove out to the country club, a marvellous building—one could without exaggeration call it a marble palace—which nestles on the flat land at the foot of a volcano, and sat there and watched the sunset, drinking in the beauty of our surroundings. That night as we dined with Mr. Sumner, the general manager of the Salvador Railroad, on our expressing a wish to visit and photograph the great lava flow of the volcano San Salvador where it had poured down and obliterated the railroad, very courteously our host offered to take us, and the next morning, on a special coach, we left on our journey.

CHAPTER XXII

THE NAHUATL INDIANS—WE RECEIVE A WARNING

THE railroads in Central America are engineering feats of the first magnitude. The track may run across ravines hundreds of feet deep, zigzag up the side of a mountain to perform a perilous descent with perhaps half a dozen hairpin bends, or sweep giddily along the edge of a precipice.

Shortly after leaving El Salvador I wondered many times how we managed to keep to the metals; we tore round sharp bends and over bridges where it seemed that at any moment the car must overturn and we should make an abrupt exit from this world. When we arrived at our destination we left the coach on a siding, and climbed the jagged masses of black lava which were like molten metal after it had cooled. For miles the flow extended, with great pits and caverns, and one could see where, overcoming obstructions, the lava stream had rushed on, devastating and irresistible, rearing up until it formed great cliffs.

Here we had rather an unusual experience. We had climbed down into a deep pit, probably some twenty-five feet, to photograph the sides. Although it was extremely difficult to get down, we managed it somehow; but in our descent we dislodged a large piece of lava which fell to the bottom. When we came to return we found we could not climb up again.

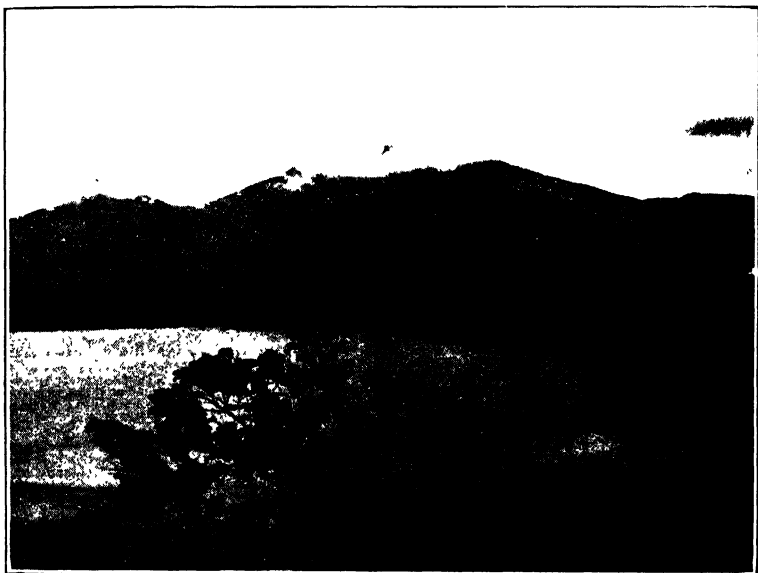
The heat in the pit was insufferable with the sun blazing into it from above; not a breath of air found its way in, and as the sun rose higher conditions became unbearable.

Try as we might, we could not reach a projection above our heads by which to haul ourselves up. We piled lumps of lava on top of one another and, climbing onto them, struggled to obtain a hold, but in spite of everything we could do it was still beyond our reach. Finally I got on top of the pile and bent over as far as I could, and Lady Brown then gingerly climbed up and by resting her hands on my head managed at last to stand upright; in this way she was able to reach the projection, obtain a foothold, and clamber out, leaving me at the bottom of the hole—which was the inevitable sequence that neither of us had thought of. There I remained stuck.

In the end, after many frantic efforts, I wedged my toe into a chink and, hanging on like a fly, somehow or other scrambled out. Fortunately I had my top-boots on and so saved my shins from being barked from knee to instep. As it was, my right hand was badly lacerated.

Rejoining our coach de luxe we continued on our way through beautiful country, and alighted at a little wayside place in the jungle whence, in a primitive mule-drawn vehicle, we reached Lake Coatepeque. The cloud effects on the great mountain range were exquisite, accentuated by the magnified shadows they threw on the still waters of the lake.

Living in thatched dwellings along the waterside are the Nahuatl Indians. They are simple, friendly people, darker in colour than most other tribes, and decidedly Mongolian in appearance—short, broad-shouldered, with pronounced brachycephalic skulls. The women appeared much more stupid than the men—they are best described as wooden-faced. The habit the majority of the children have of squirming about completely naked on the damp earth and mud at the side of the lake no doubt accounts for the hookworm from which it was easy to see they were suffering. This was obvious by their large and distended stomachs.



1. LAKE COATEPEQUE.

2. GREAT LAVA FLOW FROM VOLCANO

Like other tribes, a large percentage of these people are afflicted with a disease of the eyes and nose which causes an incessant suppuration of the former and discharge of the latter.

It is extraordinary what a total disregard they have for cleanliness. The thatched dwellings are very primitive, very dirty, and with a decidedly fishy odour clinging to everything. If the disease of the eyes and nose is infectious, which I feel sure it must be, it will continue to levy its toll of life and health until they have been taught hygienic conditions in their huts and persons, and cease to expectorate and throw filth on the earthen floors, which seems to be a habit universal among Indian tribes in Central America.

Out in the lake some yards from the shore were many dead trees, and on these clung naked boys, fishing. Looking exactly like monkeys with their dark skins and the way they had of hanging on, there they perched, with thin bamboo poles in their hands. Now and again one would catch a small fish, not more than four inches in length, and every time this happened the successful angler gave a strange long call which was answered by the other fishermen patiently dangling lines in the water. In the lake a few feet out from the banks a number of naked men were also fishing, up to their armpits in the water, while others crouched immersed on the edge of beds of rushes which grew out from the shore, all waiting expectantly.

For a long time we watched them. They did not move, their arms were rigidly extended holding their bamboo poles. How they could possibly remain in water for hours at a time like statues, I cannot conceive. The muscles of their arms must be very different from ours, for I am certain only a native whose body has been trained from birth to endure great strain could possibly stand the test. Like the Zutuhile at Atitlan, the entire population here, as far as I could see, spent their time fishing. But though the boys hanging like monkeys onto the dead trees, and the men up

to their armpits and chins in the water were remarkable, still more so were the craft they used on the lake. These are curious little rafts, consisting of two pieces of wood nailed together, with a tiny stool in the centre. When a man sits on this, the pieces of wood are almost submerged, leaving the little seat protruding above the surface. They are experts in handling this practical though primitive contraption; and the way they paddle and at the same time keep their balance is marvellous. They look just as if they are sitting on the water.

From Coatepeque we passed through the town of Santa Ana, and were on our way to the railroad when we were stopped by two armed soldiers who, for some reason, demanded our names. We tried to explain that by the orders of the President we could go where we chose, but we simply could not make them understand. They insisted that we should write down our names. In the end, deciding it would save time, we did so; they looked at the paper and then enquired if what we had written was in Spanish. We indicated that ours were English names, inscribed in English, whereupon they requested that we translate them into Spanish. How we were to do this was beyond us, but I scribbled something which they looked at vacantly; and it then dawned upon us that they could neither read nor write.

We had gone about a hundred yards, laughing over the absurdity of the incident, when I said :

" Tell you what—I'll bet you that if we go back and give them a peso apiece we'll get that bit of paper. Now watch."

I stopped our ancient vehicle and told the driver to go back. The two soldiers, seeing us return, walked towards us. One of them was still holding the paper; I didn't say a word but simply took it from him, gave them each a peso, raised my hat, and we drove away. As we looked back they waved their hands to us jovially, turned and made rapidly in the direction of Santa Ana.



NAHUATL INDIANS FISHING IN LAKE COATEPEQUE

"Only one guess needed," I said to Lady Brown, "as to where they're heading!"

"The nearest *cantina*, I suppose," she answered without hesitation.

"Exactly."

San Salvador is a land of volcanoes; eruptions and earthquake shocks are frequent. The town of Santa Ana which we had just passed is close to the great volcano of that name; while nearer to the Pacific Coast Izalco rears its clean-cut, conical peak. This volcano is known to seamen who pass backwards and forwards on the Pacific route as the "beacon of Central America." At the time it was very active. We noticed that regularly every three minutes a great blast of smoke and steam shot up from the crater; and it is remarkable that in this and the adjoining Republics steam is discharged with this same regularity in widely separated places. On clear nights the lurid glow of molten lava running down the sides of Izalco can be seen thirty miles away.

At the foot of the volcano live the Izalco Indians, who speak a language entirely their own, and quite distinct from any other. Poor devils; six months later, on a never-to-be-forgotten day, accompanied by tremendous earthquake shocks a fresh crater was suddenly blown in the side; a violent eruption followed, and boulders, smaller stones and masses of ashes were hurled into the air to descend in a red-hot avalanche, burying the whole of the adjacent countryside. Molten lava rolled down the steep slopes and completely wiped out the Indian village, killing hundreds of natives.

A great volcanic eruption has to be seen to be realized. As a nerve-shattering and awful experience I question if it can have an equal; and it is almost incredible how rapidly not only the mountain but the topography of the countryside can be completely changed. Before the eruption of the volcano San Salvador in 1917 there was a lake some

miles in length, much like Coatepeque; and, fantastic as it may seem, in a single day it disappeared. Frightful results followed when this body of water met the subterranean fires. The earth's surface for many miles around heaved, and in places actually burst open with a terrifying noise. To add to the horror a dull roaring was continuous; the city of El Salvador was laid low, and then followed the eruption.

While we were in this vicinity we noticed frequent tremors, but the natives were unconcerned. They informed us that as long as Izalco was active all would be well, but if the volumes of smoke pouring out from it ceased, then—beware.

We had an amusing experience as we rattled back over the rails to El Salvador. A few miles outside the city a considerable number of natives were walking along the track in the same direction that we were travelling, who despite the whistle of our train preserved that indifference customary with the native. I expected the driver would slow down, but he evidently knew them better than I did, and it seemed that our speed increased. We were almost on them when from the whistle issued a furious blast and they scattered in all directions, several of them tumbling head over heels into the bush which grows on either side of the railroad. We looked back, and far from being resentful, they appeared to be treating it as a great joke, the more fortunate ones grinning and taking a malicious pleasure in those who had sprawled full length in the prickly vegetation.

On arriving at the "Nuevo Mundo," the hotel where we were staying, we ran into several old American friends of ours who had just come from Nicaragua. In the Republics we were always meeting people we knew, and it was good to swop reminiscences. It seemed to be a mystery to them why Lady Brown should undertake these strenuous and hazardous expeditions.



THE VOLCANO OF IZALCO GIVES WARNING



MY BULLET ENDS SUFFERING OF MUTILATED TAPIR (p. 204)

"But you seem to thrive on them," they remarked.

"Maybe," she answered. "But look at the colour of my skin!" She was burnt black, but they assured her that according to the papers this was the latest craze in America and Europe.

"Where are you off to now?" we were asked. "Tell us, if you know—which we doubt, as it is proverbial you never make fixed plans."

"This time," Lady Brown answered, "we have mapped out our itinerary. From here we are going on to Spanish Honduras and then Nicaragua." As she mentioned the latter Republic I noticed their expression change and become serious. One of them turned to me.

"Take my advice, M-H, and keep out of Nicaragua. There's trouble brewing."

"D'you mean a revolution?"

"Undoubtedly," my friend replied. "It may break out any day, and it's going to be damned serious—not the usual pantomime affair. They're thirsting for one another's blood up there."

Lady Brown smiled.

"It's the funniest thing in the world—we seem unable to escape revolutions. Well, if there is one," she added, "it will be the third I've seen. I'm getting used to them now."

"I suppose it's no use offering advice," one of our friends said. "But if you're landed in Nicaragua when the fighting starts, there you'll stop. Not a chance of getting away, and that bunch is no respecter of persons."

Shortly after they rose to go to their rooms, and having a hunch there had been more left unsaid than said, I excused myself to Lady Brown and went out with them.

"Look here, old dear," I said to one of them; "you know more than you've told us. What's the trouble in Nicaragua, and why so certain a revolution is on the tapis?"

"Don't ask too much," he answered. "But if on your honour you'll not breathe a word, here's a tip. The rebels

are massing on the Honduras border. You know the route into the Republic after you reach Amapala? You take a launch, land, and then it's a matter of mule-back and ox-cart."

"I know it well."

"Then give it a wide berth if you thought of travelling that way."

"But damn it, that's exactly the route we'd planned!"

"Change your plans. I'm telling you—and I mean it—don't go that way," he reiterated. "If you must know, and as you've pledged your word you won't give it away, that's where the rebels are massing." He bent over and whispered in my ear. "Chinandega."

I shook his hand.

"I'm not quite a fool, old thing," I said. "I understand. A man—well, he's got to look after himself; but a woman mixed up in a rabble when the lust of blood turns men into beasts—God help her. I'll take a boat from Amapala to Corinto. By the way, how's the trade in canned goods?" I enquired innocently. "I suppose there's a boom, especially in the vicinity of Chinandega?"

His face broke into a broad grin.

"Oh boy—and how!" he chuckled.

There was no need for me to ask any further questions. I had guessed, when he warned us, that nobody knew better than he and his friends when and where the trouble would break out. What a multitude of sins in the guise of arms and ammunition can be covered by cases of canned goods.

Later on when Lady Brown began to cross-examine me as to whether I had learned anything further from our American friends, my replies were non-committal, my one and only definite statement being "We're going by boat to Corinto. No overland route for me."

She asked no more questions. Wise woman—she understood.

CHAPTER XXIII

LAKE ILOPANGO—A CRATER THAT APPEARED IN A NIGHT —STRUCK BY A TORNADO

SAN SALVADOR, like Guatemala, is a delightful and fertile country; although perhaps unfortunate in being so highly volcanic, scenically it has a majesty which in creating an indefinable sense of suppressed force, lures rather than repels.

Although the smallest and most thickly-populated of the five countries which constitute the Central American Republics, San Salvador still has tracts which would well repay exploration. There is little doubt that the Maya territory extends farther than is at present known; ruins of this ancient, aboriginal civilization have been discovered in Yucatan, British Honduras, Guatemala, and the Republic of Honduras. In a certain region of San Salvador, about twenty miles from the Guatemalan border, there has recently been found a site undoubtedly Mayan, and although I have not seen the ruins I should judge by the description and data supplied to me by those who have, that they are probably early First Empire. The fact that there are ruins here suggests that other burial mounds and sites are lying buried in the least-known portions of this Republic.

Each Republic has its specific lure; in San Salvador, apart from Lake Coatepeque, there are sheets of water beautiful and mysterious and therefore doubly intriguing. The President had suggested that we should see Lake Ilopango, so we determined, as time was no object, to travel out to this district and explore the strange lake and its islands.

Leaving the city at daybreak one morning, we eventually reached our objective, an eerie and lonely place. The lake is, I should judge, nearly ten miles long by five and a half broad, and it was easy to see that, like Coatepeque, it had formerly been an enormous crater which through the centuries has filled with water. In the distance we could see tiny islands, while facing us some miles beyond the opposite end, the great volcano of San Vicente towered menacingly, its peak lost among the clouds.

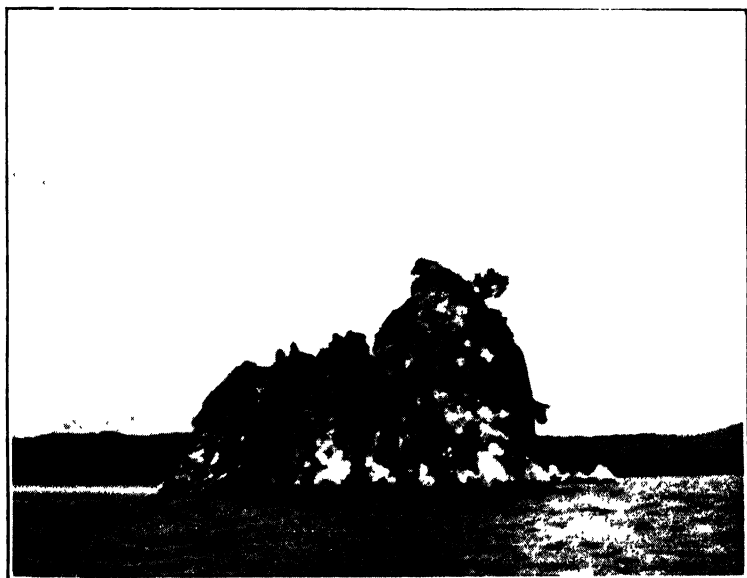
We were fortunate in obtaining a boat, and with two or three natives steered for the little islands. Isolated and unexpected, some four miles away a brown mass of rock rose high above the surface, sharply outlined in the sunlight; this we made for, and on arriving were confronted with an enormous rocky mass which looked as if it had been subjected to the extreme heat of a furnace and then cooled off. Although the island appeared to be solid stone, yet on landing with much difficulty we at once found that this was a delusion. The apparent rock was so friable that to walk over or climb it was not only almost impossible, but, unless the greatest care were taken, extremely dangerous. We would tread on what looked like a boulder, to discover it crumbled beneath us and disintegrated into dust.

One dejected and stunted tree grew out from the top, though where the roots found nourishment is a mystery. In places where the rock had split and flaked away it was striated with what seemed to be a metallic substance. It was a most unpleasant place to climb, yet it held an undeniable fascination. It was so unlike any other strata we had seen in San Salvador that it gave us much to think about.

With perseverance we finally reached the summit, where we gained an excellent panoramic view of the entire lake and surrounding country. We were glad to rest, for the climb had been very difficult. But at last I said I thought it was time we were returning. Lady Brown agreed, but



LAKE ILOPANGO. SAN VICENTE IN THE DISTANCE



THE CRATER WHICH ROSE IN A NIGHT

still sat there. After some minutes I again ventured to suggest we made a move.

"Well, why don't you?" she retorted. The return journey was not a pleasant prospect, but we could not stay there for ever. Stoically I rose.

"Come along,—it's got to be done," I said as I pulled her up from where she was perched like a bird on its aerie. "Test every foot of the way, and for God's sake be careful."

We began the descent, crab-fashion; Lady Brown was in front while I, above, was holding her hand and rendering what help I could. Very slowly we proceeded, when suddenly our return was violently and unexpectedly precipitated. The ground on which I was standing broke away and powdered beneath my feet. Down I went; my legs shot out and caught Lady Brown in the small of the back, and in clouds of dust and a landslip of rubble the pair of us made an ungraceful toboggan slide to the bottom. Coughing and choking and hardly able to see out of our eyes, we picked ourselves up ruefully, and as our hands went simultaneously to a part of our persons which was now feeling extremely sore we looked at one another and burst out laughing.

"You can go first next time," Lady Brown declared; "I believe you did it on purpose." And added, "I could have climbed down quite easily alone."

I nearly retorted angrily, but remembered the advice once given me by an old native servant of mine—"Boss, be smooth; say nothing."

Her breeches had suffered a slight disintegration, as I could see but she couldn't. She soon found out, however; and for five minutes I was treated to her enlightening opinion of me. Fortunately she had a safety-pin, and with this (at the moment priceless) article she managed temporarily to repair the damage.

On reaching the boat we found that to sit down on the

hard boards was, to say the least of it, uncomfortable. I preferred to try sideways.

We questioned the natives about this curious island, and they told us that some years previously there had occurred violent earthquake shocks, when the island we had just been climbing suddenly made its appearance above the surface in a single night. It was really a crater, rising sheer from the bottom of the lake which just here is more than nine hundred feet deep. They declared that at the same time the lake opened in several places and sheets of water were flung high into the air together with stones, ashes, and sand, while in parts the lake boiled and threw off great jets of steam. Simultaneously, a beautiful fertile island about three miles distant from the one brought so suddenly into existence entirely disappeared.

As we passed over the lake we found a certain confirmation of these stories, for in one place the water was almost boiling hot, where a subterranean spring evidently poured in from the depths below. Everywhere we found the greenish, opaque water very warm, the surface partially covered with a yellow scum, on which floated masses of pumice-stone, so thick in parts as to be drawn together by attraction or by the currents, and thus form floating islands.

The low-lying country bordering the lake is an undesirable place to live. It is infested with anopheles mosquitoes, the fever-carrying species, and malaria among the natives (who are a sickly people, and look it) is very prevalent and of a particularly severe type.

During the wet season by no stretch of the imagination can the weather in Central America be described as monotonous. For rapidity and violence of change it excels any other country I know. We had travelled a few miles farther; not a ripple disturbed the lake, the sky was blue and cloudless—then from nowhere a sinister bank of clouds rose above the mountains straight ahead. A deadly

silence fell and overhung us, the sun beat mercilessly down and the heat became intensified and unnatural. The blue dome of the sky changed slowly until it looked hard and brassy, casting over everything a metallic light. Not a breath of air tempered the insufferable heat which, devoid of humidity, seared like an electric burn.

A few minutes before we had been perspiring; now our skins were dry and parched. The solid body of black clouds piled up and marshalled over San Vicente. Without waiting for us to give them orders, the natives had turned and were now making as hard as they could for our starting-point. We had gone a bare hundred yards when without warning above the mountains the clouds were ripped and torn in every direction with bands of vivid flame. Across the heavens the lightning sprayed in narrow veins broken by broad ribbons which, flashing earthwards, dazzled the eyes. And still there was no air. We knew what was coming—we knew it was not possible for us to gain the shore before the tornado broke.

The lightning increased until the impenetrable clouds rolling towards us were illumined by a continuous blaze. A thin whistling noise arose and echoed round the lake; its direction was indeterminate. Slowly it changed from a whistle to a low murmur rising in crescendo to a sullen roar. Then far in our wake on the water close to the shore a white line appeared and advanced with the speed of an aeroplane. The roar grew into a menacing growl as the storm struck us in all its fury.

It is impossible to describe the chaos. It was a medley of shrieks, howls, and piercing wails, with a deep bass note rumbling through it all, while roars of thunder broke like eighteen-inch guns, deafening and devastating. From the placid mirror of a few minutes before, the lake had now become a raging tumult, covered in white-flecked waves from which the crests were torn by the violent wind, filling the air with flying spray. Pieces of pumice-

stone were ripped from the water by the velocity of the hurricane, and flung in a continuous rattle into the boat and against the sides.

Waves were now breaking over us, and the two of us set to work bailing as hard as we could to prevent the boat from sinking. Our efforts appeared to be futile; by now the storm-centre was directly overhead, the gale steadily increased, the waves rose higher, and the water gained on us. Frantically we bailed—it was our only hope—when abruptly, as if turned off by a tap, the wind ceased in an ominous calm. We thanked God for the lull which enabled us to bail out the boat, and waited for what would follow. The shrieking and howling of the wind at an end, the full roar of the thunder broke on us. It was terrific.

Suddenly an awful blinding light played over us; we and the natives ducked involuntarily. A frightful crash broke right overhead, shaking the boat and almost splitting the drums of our ears, and a wall of water descended. It could not be called rain—it was a cataract, so heavy that again we had to commence bailing. For ten minutes it was incessant, then, presto! it ceased. The thunder rumbled on, then died away in the distance. In spite of the herculean efforts of the natives to reach the shelter of the land, we had not made it when the gloom passed, the clouds rolled on and the sun blazed down from a clear sky. The lake, gently heaving, glistened insolently.—Storms? There were no such things!

We were of course drenched to the skin and had even removed our top-boots and unlaced our breeches at the knees to allow the water to run out. The blaze of sunshine, by the time we reached land, had dried our clothes; God was in His heaven, and all was right with the world.

On making the shore, as Lady Brown rose from her seat I began to laugh. She looked round at me. I pointed, and her hand stole behind towards the precious safety-pin. Discovering it was secure, "What on earth are you making

that ridiculous noise for? " she asked indignantly. " I see nothing funny to laugh at."

But I couldn't stop. It was her ill-fated breeches again. When she had returned to the boat after sliding down the side of the crater, one of the natives, noticing for obvious reasons how difficult it was for her to sit on the hard boards, had thoughtfully folded a piece of material and placed it on the seat to ease her. The saturated condition of her clothes, combined with the warmth of her body, had caused the pattern of the material, a combination of red, green, and blue, to become duplicated on the back part of her breeches. Discovering what caused me so much amusement, womanlike, she exclaimed,

" I can't go back like this, and walk into the hotel ! "

" I'll take my coat off, and hold it close to you," I ventured; but I regret to say my well-meant suggestion did not meet with the expected approval.

On our way back to the city we noticed that out of evil had come good. Millions of locusts had been destroyed; the torrential rain had turned the road into a river, sweeping them up in heaps, and the dead swarms looked like small sandbanks. This was evidently a year for locusts, many miles of country, as in Guatemala, being denuded of vegetation.

A few days later we decided it was time to continue on our way; and thanks to the general manager of the International Railroads of Central America, a private coach was attached to the train, and we left El Salvador *en route* for Cutuco. From here we should have to take a boat across the Gulf of Fonseca to Amapala, the island port on the Pacific of the Republic of Honduras, a country which has always appealed to me, and where I have had several remarkable experiences, a few gruesome, and one or two, I fear, that must remain untold.

CHAPTER XXIV

GENERAL LEE CHRISTMAS, MAN OF BLOOD AND IRON—THE MASSACRE ON THE VIADUCT—THE LAND OF THE GUN— TEGUCIGALPA

BOMBARDED with good wishes from our friends, we boarded our saloon on the train and left the capital of San Salvador on our journey to the Pacific Coast. We felt somewhat embarrassed when we were informed by the attendant that instructions had been given for the train to stop at any part of the line where we might desire to take photographs. Other arrangements had been made for our comfort, and altogether we were very bucked with ourselves.

The railroad passes through stretches of beautiful panoramic scenery, particularly in the Valle de Jiboa, and later it runs alongside, and in places through, the terrible lava flow which poured down the volcano of San Miguel when it erupted a few years ago. The devastation is even worse and the volume of the flow greater than that of the volcano San Salvador; the violence of its outburst must have been beyond imagination. For miles the lava, like a vast rolling and blackened sea, has obliterated the countryside.

The Indians who live in the district have built, on the immense boulders amidst the lava at the foot of the volcano, a figure of the Virgin and, at her feet, the carved image of a kneeling woman praying to the Lady of Succour for mercy and protection. This statue has been erected by the natives who escaped death in the eruption, firmly believing that it will be infallible in preventing any further outburst. Here they go to pray in their pathetic and implicit faith.

Without incident we arrived at Cutuco.

Nearby is the port of La Union, and it was here that some years ago I first met my old friend, General Lee Christmas, who has, sad to say, now crossed to the great majority. What a man—what a fighter! A revolution was incomplete without him. He cared for neither God, man, nor the devil. The true story of Lee Christmas's life has never been told, nor that of a certain revolution in one of the Republics, which would have had a very different result had it not been for his Machiavellian stratagem.

At that period of his adventurous career he was a driver on the railroad, when the furnaces of the engines were fed with wood.

The rebel troops had met with considerable success, but their efforts to capture the capital had up till then been doomed to failure. A short distance from the city the railroad runs over a trestle bridge crossing a ravine hundreds of feet deep. It is a single line, quite open and unprotected on either side from one end to the other. The Federal troops were massed at the end of the bridge nearest to the capital, while the rebels were on the other side of the ravine. An impasse had been reached.

Lee Christmas, who, as usual, was with the rebels, now took command, and with devilish ingenuity made his plans. He ordered that a long, low, railroad-truck should be filled with logwood, which is extremely heavy—in fact it will not float on water. Behind this an engine was brought up under full steam. The trap was set, and at his signal the rebels retreated. The General in Command of the Federal troops, seeing the rebels evacuate their position, concluded that, disheartened, they had given up their attempt to capture the city. A man of action, he determined that now was the time to strike a decisive blow, and commanded his men at once to cross the bridge and attack. On to the viaduct they swarmed, and were more than half-way over when Lee Christmas, who had been expectantly

waiting in the cab, opened the throttle, and the engine, pushing the heavily laden truck, started across the bridge full at the body of men advancing along the single track. Too late the Government troops saw the ghastly position into which they had been trapped. There was no fighting; it was simply slaughter without a chance of escape. Seeing the engine and truck bearing down on them, the soldiers in front turned in precipitate flight, stampeding into a mad panic those immediately behind, who could not retreat owing to the press of men still advancing from the rear, who had not realized the danger. Desperately they fought among themselves in the narrow space while inevitable death rushed towards them. In their frenzied struggle many of the Federal troops were thrust off the unprotected sides of the bridge to be dashed to pieces in the depths below when the irresistible Juggernaut struck the main body, crushed and mangled them beneath its wheels, and swept them off the viaduct like flies. Hard behind swarmed the rebels. The Government troops—those fortunate few who being in the extreme rear had regained the city end of the bridge, and those who had not started—were utterly demoralized, and the way was open for the triumphant entry of Lee Christmas and his men into the capital.

Lee Christmas and I were fated to meet many times. It was in Spanish Honduras that I saw him last; and the old and stirring days we had known together came back vividly to me as Lady Brown and I embarked in our launch to cross the Gulf of Fonseca bound for that Republic. San Salvador, Guatemala, and British Honduras lay behind, all with their lure of ancient civilizations, primitive Indian tribes, wonderful scenery, and the pleasure of friendships. Yet it was with a strange anticipation that I looked out across the water to the mountains inland, and longed to set foot once again in the dear old turbulent Republic.

Crossing the Gulf is always more or less a gamble. The



1. GENERAL LEE CHRISTMAS.

2. PART OF REBEL ARMY

weather may be perfect; on the other hand (and more or less frequently) it may be the very devil. Just as on Lake Ilopango storms bank up without warning. But on this occasion we were lucky, and after a run of about an hour and a half we had landed at Amapala.

Already the Commandante had received a message from the President of the Republic that we should be given the courtesy of the port, and at the end of the little pier we were met by the officials, who not only helped us but gave us a real and cordial welcome.

That night we met a most entertaining person, who, becoming mellow after plentiful lubrication, confided in us the real reason why he had established himself in Honduras. He was an American, and had lived a truly adventurous life—certainly not within the law. Finding himself in the States without a nickel, and having a perverted idea that it was no crime to relieve someone who had plenty, he waited round the corner of a block in a certain city with a rubber club, laid low a respected citizen and decamped with the spoils. The police got hard on his trail; but, evidently believing in the motto "In for a penny, in for a pound," he extended his tactics to other inoffensive people, and was lucky enough to escape from the United States with his loot (which I believe amounted to only a few hundred dollars) and reach the sanctuary of Honduras.

With many suggestive winks he invited me over to his residence. I had little need to enquire what his business was, and refused the invitation; whereupon he became insistent, grew very red in the face, shouted, and became abusive. The stage had been reached when I thought perhaps a '45 would be necessary to remove him, when the door opened and the authorities, who evidently knew him, made their appearance. His exit was not dignified.

But the next morning, undaunted, he was back again as if nothing had happened. He was a most impossible and

importunate specimen; he now wanted to sell parrots, but knowing my man I had no trouble. He left—and quickly.

We bade good-bye to the little island that morning, and continued across the Gulf of Fonseca to San Lorenzo on the mainland, whence the road runs up to the capital. The Gulf has many uninhabited islands; planing over one were thousands of man-o'-war or frigate birds—even in a high wind they can remain almost stationary without movement of their wings. This was evidently one of their breeding grounds. The island and its vegetation were quite white, caused by the droppings from innumerable birds that nest there and make it a metropolis. Farther on, as we ran close to a tiny dug-out, we saw that the two fishermen in it had hooked a big fish and were having a terrific struggle with it. Both were hanging on like grim death to a stout line, and their light boat was being towed by the fish at quite a rapid rate through the water. We slowed down to watch. They were gradually regaining line until the fish appeared to be deep down under the boat, when suddenly with a violent jerk, down went the bow, and the water poured in. Taken by surprise the natives lost their balance on the slippery rounded bottom, and fell backwards, letting go their hold on the line. Of this the fish took full advantage. Before they could recover themselves, their hidden adversary had torn off until the extreme end of the line was reached, and once more their labours commenced. Although we were anxious to get to the mainland, we could not resist waiting to see the end of the fight. The fishermen were ultimately successful, and as they brought their quarry to the surface alongside the dug-out and its head showed above water, we saw they had hooked a large jew-fish, a hideous brute with yellowish mottled body and enormous mouth and gills. I should judge this specimen must have weighed nearly five hundred pounds. They could not get it into the boat, so they tied it to the stern of their craft, and contentedly, their day's

work well done, began the arduous task of paddling back to Amapala, towing the fish behind them.

We arrived at San Lorenzo, which consists of a collection of not more than a dozen houses of a sort. The men, as usual, were all armed, for the Republic of Honduras is the land of the gun; nearly every man carries one—not secretly hidden, but for all the world to see. And the gun acts as a deterrent more potent than any judge or jury.

Without delay our baggage was transferred to a car in which we started on our journey of a hundred miles to the capital.

The road from the coast into the interior is a great engineering feat. For a few miles after leaving San Lorenzo the car threaded its way through cactus and mesquite, and bumped over a flat plain where there seemed to be no road at all, until low, hilly country was reached and the real journey begins. The gradient, with little variation, is upwards. The scenery is different from both Guatemala and San Salvador; the mountains have not that smooth, conical appearance, but are more broken. Geologically it has always been inexplicable to me that with the volcanic countries of San Salvador and Nicaragua on either side, there is not a single active volcano in Spanish Honduras. Also, it is singularly free from earthquake shocks, whereas in the two adjoining Republics eruptions and seismic disturbances are frequent.

As we continued rising, the vista of undulating country, intersected with valleys and rushing streams, was marvelous; mile after mile of fertile land, uncultivated, little-known. We looked down on winding rivers, crystal-clear, their waters and the land adjoining giving promise of peace and plenty—gardens of Eden, but Adamless.

We met few people on the road, and no vehicles, but iguanos were plentiful. Funny brutes—it was amusing to see them by the roadside blinking their snakey eyes, while

they crouched with heads raised, watching our approach. When we were almost abreast of them, deciding it was time to run from the strange monster advancing, they would rush madly, helter-skelter, for the nearest tree, and with extraordinary rapidity scramble up the trunk, to be lost among the outflung branches and foliage.

It is a hard trip from the coast to the capital, as all long motor journeys are when the road is rutted and bumpy. Were it not for the wonderful scenery which distracts one's thoughts, in some ways this route would be even unpleasant. Leaving San Lorenzo in intense tropical heat, the road rises until about eighty miles inland it enters a cutting, and at this altitude, which I believe is over five thousand feet, a warm overcoat would be welcome.

As it was, hungry, smothered in dust and somewhat bruised, we were thankful to arrive in Tegucigalpa, the capital.

We stopped at the same old hotel where I had stayed before. What memories it brought back to me! Although very tired, after a brush up and some food we strolled out to the plaza where the men walk around outside and the ladies inside the rails. The air was exhilarating, the temperature perfect, and, greatest of all blessings, there were no mosquitoes. The band was playing a tango, and, on the surface at least, of all the people there none had a care in the world.

It was Lady Brown's first visit to Tegucigalpa; and the next morning we started out, like a couple of tourists, to see the sights.

Tegucigalpa has much in it of interest. It is a quaint place, and the cathedral of San Miguel is unique and of great age, as was the old man, its custodian, who looked as if he had come out of the Ark. In the building could be seen the carved table that was used by the Spaniards hundreds of years ago. Adjoining is the miniature graveyard of the priests who lived their lives in this confined

space and were buried there, knowing nothing of the outside world.

The two domes show the effects of frequent revolutions; shell-holes pock-mark the outer walls of the building. We made our way to the belfry, and it was sad to see the ravages that time had wrought in the old place. Climbing the steps and picking our way through the debris was difficult, but we were fully rewarded with the bird's-eye view of the city when we reached the top. It was necessary to cross some planks to visit another tower, but they looked too worm-eaten and frail to bear our weight, so, not risking it, we returned to inspect the interior. The font dates back to 1476, the altar is of solid silver, and the gold screen is of perfect workmanship, fine and intricate. It is extraordinary that it escaped undamaged the many bombardments. In a corner stood a small organ; the old man informed us that when it was originally installed an unsuccessful attempt was made to raise it to the loft. It fell, and from that day to this not a note of music has been produced from it. So there it stands, and will, doubtless, until it falls to pieces, for it is certain nobody will have the energy or initiative to remove it.

That night we dined with Mr. Arthur King, the British Chargé d'Affaires, and his wife, and informally met the President, His Excellency Dr. Pas Barona, a savant of some repute, who speaks English perfectly. The following day we drove to the palace, a very fine building, for our official reception; guards stood to attention, and we were ushered with great ceremony into the presence of His Excellency. But when the officials and dignitaries had withdrawn and we were alone, we all chatted freely over a bottle of champagne, and the President was extraordinarily frank in discussing his country and ideals.

What a remarkable difference there is between Tegucigalpa now and the Tegucigalpa of a few years ago.

CHAPTER XXV

THE QUICKEST WITH THE GUN SURVIVES—REVOLUTION! —THE DRAMA OF THE FLOWER—THE MARCH AGAINST THE REBELS

IN the old days General Lee Christmas had played a prominent part in Spanish Honduras, occupying many positions. At one time he was Chief of Police, and was certainly not the most beloved man in the country, although everybody had a wholesome respect for him and his prowess with the gun. Christmas never argued—he always said it was a waste of time; a bullet was much more efficacious and saved such a lot of trouble. Many were the attempts made to remove him from this earthly sphere, but he seemed to bear a charmed life, was always one too many for them, and the lightning rapidity and deadliness of his gun-play was responsible for many fresh faces in heaven—or hell.

We were in the middle of a game of poker once—Christmas was one of the best players I ever sat down with—when a man suddenly appeared in the room, gun in hand, which he levelled full at the General and pulled the trigger. He was not more than six feet away, and nothing could have saved Christmas's life except a miracle. And here was one. For the gun, an automatic, jammed, and it was the last time that man ever put finger to trigger. He walked in—and was carried out.

But perhaps the most amazing escape Christmas ever had was when on a certain evening he was sitting outside the door of his residence. The doors of practically all the houses in Tegucigalpa open directly onto the streets, only

a few having any space between. Smoking one of his eternal cigars, he was reading an American newspaper when a native passed so close to him that his coat rustled the paper, and without turning his head said quietly, "Men coming up street kill you."

Not by a movement did Christmas show that he heeded the warning. His eyes just momentarily glanced up over the top of the newspaper and rested for the fraction of a second on four men who were carelessly walking towards him. But the old war-horse was ready. They had approached to within twenty feet when down went his paper. Four times his gun barked—in such rapid succession that the sound was a single rattle. There was no time for the assassins to draw their guns, and four men lay on the ground, three stone dead and one writhing in his death agony.

Lee Christmas was a big man in all ways; in stature he must have stood six feet two or three, and he was broad in proportion; quick as lightning and unerring with his gun, he was ruthless and brave to a degree in battle, and with the fair sex he was equally daring and in a way deadly. I forget how many times he had been married, but he once told me he had forty-two children.

Here in Tegucigalpa memories crowded on me of a time when in a certain capital of Central America without warning a revolution broke out. I was a close friend of the President, his brother, nephews, and other Government officials. My sojourn had so far been uneventful; I had enjoyed myself thoroughly. Every night there was a dance at the club or a game of cards, after which it amused me to accompany the President's nephew on an innocent and rather romantic expedition. He had fallen desperately in love with a languorous daughter of the Republic who was really one of the most lovely creatures I have ever seen, with a creamy skin and soft dark eyes. She had a delightful figure and a sinuous allurements which gave promise of

much, and roused the devil in a man. Her admirer would hire the mirimba band, and about two o'clock in the morning, preceded by the musicians, we would plant ourselves outside the lady's residence, when on the air would break the plaintive strains of the mirimba, the performers having definite instructions that the music must be very low and pleading. Here we would stand by the hour, while the members of the band did their best to make my companion's love known to the damsel behind the iron-barred window. (Nearly all houses in that city have the appearance of prisons.) I don't think his overtures were warmly reciprocated, or else the lady suffered from an excess of modesty, for not once did I observe the curtains move, or the object of his adoration give him so much as a glance of encouragement. Poor chap—it was too bad.

But his love-affairs and serenading were rudely interrupted. We were awakened one morning with the serious news that the coast towns on the Caribbean were in a state of revolt and in the hands of rebels, and an army was already marching towards the capital. The Minister of War and General-in-Command of the Federal troops immediately took charge. Every man who could possibly be conscripted became a soldier, which meant he was given an ancient rifle and as many cartridges as he could carry. The hotel was turned from a travellers' hostelry into a G.H.Q. for officers; all day they would ride on horseback through the arch into the patio, for a revolution was not to be despised, and provided a welcome break in the monotony of the capital. Nobody was allowed out on the streets after sundown except a privileged few; the curfew was strictly in force. For hours every day the cathedral bells pealed, triumphal arches were erected with "Viva el Presidente" in large letters across them, while everybody wore bands of coloured ribbon round their hats, the outward, and often unreliable, expression of loyalty to the



ONLY THE SAFES REMAINED AFTER THE REBELS HAD RAZED SAN
PEDRO SULA



ANOTHER VIEW OF SAN PEDRO SULA

President and Government now in office. Machine-guns were posted at the Presidencia and the streets echoed with the tread of booted officers followed by regiments of shoeless men of all breeds, their clothes in a state of rags. I have often wondered how they managed to patch them, for the majority were covered in nothing but a collection of old pieces, until there seemed to be none of the original garment left. Where the officers led their men, or for what purpose heaven only knows, and I never discovered. I expect it was really done to arouse the martial spirit of the people.

Everyone became quite enthusiastic over the revolution business, which was a godsend for the hotel and purveyors of drink, as all day and most of the night it was a continuous round of toasts. (Also headaches and hang-overs.) Eventually the day arrived when the President gave a great *fiesta* to all and sundry at a villa a few miles out from the town. Tremendous preparations had been made for this; wagons of food and an army of attendants to cater for the appetites of the many had gone ahead, and of course the inevitable bands. Champagne, brandy, whisky—it didn't go in cases—truck-loads went out, laden. It was to be a day that everyone should remember, an epic of eating and drinking—chiefly the latter.

The Minister of War, the General-in-Command, and other choice spirits, including myself, drove out together and were met by a most genial and festive President; the last thing one would have imagined was that a revolution had broken out. What a day! And what a night! Hectic does not describe it. The bands played their loudest to the incessant staccato of popping corks. Everybody toasted all and sundry. By four o'clock in the afternoon the Government had struck terror into the rebels. By eight o'clock sanguinary battles had been fought and won; by midnight the foes of the Republic were entirely annihilated—wiped from the face of the earth. It was amusing

to see the officers strutting round and being acclaimed as heroes. At two in the morning nobody cared a damn what happened. All I know is that, somewhat the worse for wear, I got back to the hotel somehow and planked myself down on the first available chair, to put it modestly, slightly exhausted.

I had been squatting here perhaps nearly an hour, half asleep and pleasantly musing, when, with a number of officers, a close friend of mine staggered in. Slowly he navigated in my direction, and fumbling, at last found and carefully withdrew from some mysterious part of his clothes a very much withered and semi-petalless flower.

"Señor," he suggested throatily, choosing his words with great care, "Is not this the most beautiful flower you have ever seen?" He bowed very low and swayed alarmingly. The effort of bending his body was too much, and had not one of the officers caught him by the arm he would have fallen. Recovering his balance he made another attempt, and again gravely asked me the same question, once more holding out the remains of the scraggy and crumpled blossom which had originally borne some resemblance to a daisy.

Tired out, I looked at it, laughed contemptuously and thoughtlessly replied,

"It's the most damned, miserable-looking thing I've ever seen." Immediately I had spoken I knew I had made a fatal *faux pas*. My friend's face instantly changed and became crimson with rage. In a second my gun was levelled at that part of his body where trousers and shirt meet. Then, smiling and in the most persuasive tones, "Pardon me, Señor," I said. "It has been a strenuous day and I cannot see too well. Will you confer on me the great privilege of holding the beautiful flower that I may examine it more closely?"

Somewhat appeased he slowly handed it to me. I took it reverently.

"It is indeed beautiful," I exclaimed. "You are a lucky man to be the proud possessor of such an inestimable treasure."

I had stood on the threshold of death. In my sleepy condition I had unwittingly been guilty of an insult so great that only a bullet could have effaced it. The flower had been given to my inebriated friend by the lady of his choice, and when I had so scornfully expressed my opinion of it I had not only offered a deadly insult to him, but worse—I had slandered the fair one whose token of regard it was.

But the fiery temperament of the Latin American can change with amazing rapidity. Mollified, he embraced me, so I continued my barefaced perjury, and again ostentatiously studying that hallowed flower, murmured a lot of fulsome nonsense, and all was well. I was once more his life-long friend and brother.

Although longing for bed, there was no escape; I had to sit and hear from beginning to end a long and oft-repeated history of his romance, much of which I am sure was imagination. His ecstasies over his ladylove would probably have continued until daylight had not the one-sided conversation fortunately been interrupted by the entrance of more revellers, whereupon he slowly rose to his feet and once more brought out the wretched flower which was now almost in the last stages of disintegration. I seized the opportunity to beat a hasty retreat to my room, convinced that the new-comers would have to go through what I had endured.

Commands had been issued that the army should marshal in full force on the following morning, but the *fiesta* had been too much for the heads of the Government and majority of the officers. There was no official countermand—it just didn't happen. But a day or two later I was roused from my bed in the early hours by bugles blaring hideously in every key; the hour had arrived for

the redoubtable sons of the Republic to muster and march from the capital to meet the rebels. When I reached the plaza some time later the troops had not all assembled, but were still drifting in through the narrow streets from various parts of the town. I had to laugh—it was their headgear that tickled me. I could not conceive where they had raked up that collection of hats; they were of every sort, size, and shape from battered old straws to hard felts, many of the latter full of holes and dents and green with age, and of course every one of them adorned with the colours of the Government. About half the troops had their rifles, relics of a bygone age, slung across their backs by pieces of stout string or rope. The remainder held their ancient muskets at any and every angle; a few apparently had so little knowledge of rifles that they were using them as props, barrel downwards.

Everybody was waiting for the last stragglers, and when at last they dawdled into the ranks the army was drawn up in the square facing the cathedral for inspection by the President and Minister of War, and the great moment arrived for the General-in-Command to harangue his men.

It was an inspiring speech. He pointed out to them their duty; extolled the virtues of their great land and the liberty they enjoyed, and appealed to them as defenders of their homes. He imitated the slogan of the Great Powers, and exhorted them to fight for democracy and freedom. Stolidly they listened. They had not the faintest idea what he was talking about, poor devils. They had no liberty; there was no freedom; and they did not know whither they were going or why they had to fight. But finally a move was made. As they started on the march, a jingling and rattling broke on the air. Tied round them with pieces of string dangled every conceivable make of old and dented tin can which had once contained jam or bully-beef. Quite a few had empty five-gallon gasolene tins hanging down their backs. The entire

population of the capital had turned out and now thronged the streets to bid adieu to their heroes. Flowers were strewn on the men, while young girls hung garlands round the necks of the general and officers.

As the men marched through the dusty streets towards the outskirts of the town, frequently in twos and threes they broke away and turned into the *cantinas* to have a farewell drink with their friends. Bottles of raw white spirit were freely handed round, and as the fiery liquor began to take effect, careless song changed to shouts and coarse jests hurled at the women. By the time they were clear of the city the whole army was straggling and staggering all over the place with no attempt at order. Hundreds of citizens had mixed with the soldiers and were trudging along with them, and embraces were continually taking place. Among the crowd were many women—Indians, or of Indian descent. They were taking it very seriously; tears were streaming down their cheeks, and on every side rose a murmur: Why should the good God bring such affliction upon them?

Fifty resolute men could have routed the entire army; in its hopelessly disordered condition it was nothing more or less than a rabble.

At a distance of over thirty kilometres from the capital the Federal troops met the rebels, and there, facing one another, the two armies encamped.

CHAPTER XXVI

AN HEROIC ENCOUNTER—THE RIVER OF BLOOD—SELF- IMPOSED DEATH

THE occupying of strategic positions had obviously never occurred to the General-in-Command of either the Federal or rebel armies. No preparations were made for battle, neither was there any excitement. It might have been a picnic on a large scale.

On the night of arrival the gallant commander of the Federal troops sent a note to his dear friend, the head of the rebel army, and invited him over to dinner. The reply, in most cordial terms, was in due course followed by the redoubtable general, accompanied by his bodyguard, who received a warm welcome from all the officers, and in the most fraternal manner they sat down together, the best of friends. The inevitable poker game started afterwards and continued until nearly daybreak, when the rebel leader, mellow and happy, left for his camp.

The next evening the order was reversed; the commander of the Government troops dined with the opposition, and so the farce went on for some days, not only the officers but the entire forces of both sides fraternizing freely and becoming inextricably mixed. Quite a few wandered off, probably back to their homes; they were never seen again at head-quarters. But in the end, as the armies could not remain there for ever, something had to be done; never should it be said that the brave warriors had met when the Republic was in the throes of a revolution without making history. A capture of some sort was undoubtedly indicated, and this was nicely and amicably arranged.

After a banquet, in which both generals and officers of the two sides took part, the armies separated with many expressions of goodwill, and the Government troops marched for the capital, doubtlessly accompanied by some of the rebels, while, vice versa, a certain number of Federals remained with their friends in the opposing army. The spoils of war consisted, on the side of the Government, of a mule, and on that of the rebels, two or three rifles. And so honour was satisfied.

Anyone knowing the true facts and later witnessing the return of the Federal army, would have doubted his senses.

As the vanguard came in sight of the city the bells of the cathedral and all the other churches pealed out, rockets were fired and the people crowded into the main street showering flowers and confetti on the heroes. The capital was *en fête* and a public holiday was declared. With difficulty the general and a body of soldiers forced their way through the surging throng until they reached the plaza, where they came to a halt swelling with pride at the adulation poured on them by the citizens who vied with each other in the extravagance of their praise. Salvos of cheering rent the air, while magically every man, woman, and child seemed to possess a flag which they all waved madly. The revolution with its horrors was over.

The native women who had before followed the army in the depths of despair, wondering why the Almighty had so grievously stricken them by taking their men, were seized with religious fervour; by dozens they were kneeling on the cathedral steps with hands upraised in thanksgiving, convinced that their prayers to the saints had been answered and their men restored to them by divine intervention. It was a pleasing and happy ending.

But if the outcome of the revolution was surprising, a still more extraordinary *dénouement* took place a few days later. Three or four of us were sitting round a table in the hotel throwing dice, when with a tremendous clatter

down the cobbled road galloped a dozen horsemen. They drew up for a moment outside the hotel, and then rode into the patio. To my surprise I recognized no less a personage than the rebel general himself together with his staff. Shortly afterwards the Minister of War arrived, and the two cordially embraced. The rebel general looked the part; he was of Indian extraction and naturally dark-skinned, his dress was the correct military uniform as worn by British and American troops, even to the Sam Browne belt, with the exception that he wore an enormous sombrero.

Later we grew to know one another well; I found him a most interesting man, and subsequent events proved him a terrible fighter. He told me the reason he had ridden into the capital: the Government had offered him the position of General-in-Command of the army, his predecessor having been exalted to the highly remunerative rank of Admiral of the Fleet.

The erstwhile rebel general is still living, though no longer is he a commander of armies or interested in revolutions; he is engaged in the peaceful pursuit of ranching on a very large scale in Nicaragua near the Honduras border.

I question whether there is any country in the world which would so well repay exploration as the Republic of Honduras. It is about as large as Great Britain, yet has a population only the size of Sheffield. There are many thousands of square miles uninhabited, at least as far as anyone knows; and, strange as it may seem in this age, there are wide regions of jungle, swamp, and mountain where no white man has ever set foot. If he has done so, he has never come out again to tell the story. Primitive Indian tribes, so it is said, live in remote parts whose culture has not evolved to that of the Stone Age; or it may well be that devolution accounts for their degenerate state. Legends and rumours circulate at irregular periods relative to mysterious buried cities; I have heard tales of

smoke rising from inaccessible mountain ranges, and strange customs and grotesque ceremonies of Indians in the interior. There is no doubt there are races and cities that have never yet been discovered.

My old friend, the veteran Doctor Brown, who makes Tegucigalpa his head-quarters, probably knows more about the jungles and Indians of the Republic than any other living man. I believe he is the only man in the world who holds the key to the riddle of a ruined city covering an immense area. This is not rumour, for he actually stumbled on it when penetrating an almost inaccessible region somewhere in Honduras. Close by, he told me, is a gigantic monolith which had formerly stood on the banks of a river; it can still be seen lying obliquely in the clear water, its position due, possibly, to one end resting on a great rock rising from the river-bed. It is quite likely that centuries ago this stela may have been some distance from the stream; owing to the heavy floods which occur annually in Honduras during the wet season rivers are frequently diverted from their original course, as the Patuca on the Atlantic side.

To the doctor I am indebted for much of my knowledge of little-known parts of the Republic. In his indefatigable prospecting for gold and silver he has penetrated parts where no other white man has ventured, and has seen sights almost past belief.

For weeks we used to play poker together every night—he has the most perfect poker-face of any man I know, and more often than not he skinned me good and plenty. But the information he gave me was worth it.

While we were in Tegucigalpa, not only were Lady Brown and I able to collect a large amount of evidence in relation to ruined cities and Indian tribes suspected to be living in unknown regions of the Republic, but circumstantial reports reached us regarding other facts never yet recorded that personally I look upon as definite. These

stories had percolated through from the interior, had been carried by nomad Indians to the outlying villages of tribes nearer civilization, and ultimately reached our ears. In a region difficult of access in this strange land, a crimson stream gushes from the bowels of the earth. It is believed by the Indians living in the district that anyone unfortunate enough even to see this unholy stream will die at full noon; and, as can well be imagined, nothing in this world would induce a native to approach within a mile of this accursed place. The legend as to the origin of this river, according to the tribe who live about ten miles distant, must be unique. The Indians believe that all those who have lived corrupt lives on earth turn at death into bats, and are condemned to a perpetual hell under the rule of a demon of evil in the form of a colossal bat, in the great underground caverns from which the crimson water flows. In their thousands these unclean spirits engage in eternal warfare, and without ceasing slaughter and tear one another to pieces; and the foul blood that runs from them in their unending conflict bursts from the caves in a gory stream.

Holding tenaciously to this horrible belief, it is no wonder the Indians look on the place with dread; and those who have studied Indian temperaments will readily understand how a native, if by accident he looked on this river of death, might assuredly die, obsessed with the inevitability of his doom. So great would be the power of suggestion that he would be incapable of fighting against it and would return to his hut, crawl into his hammock, there to remain until carried to his grave.

The explanation of this "river of blood" is simple: the subterranean stream which finds its outlet in a cavern runs through red earth similar to the Devonian strata, and emerges crimson, just as the water of a river that runs through a deposit of china-clay will appear milky-white.

It is a fact well known to scientists that there are

primitive peoples who are capable, by some remarkable process of auto-suggestion of dying at will. We had this definitely brought to our knowledge on one occasion when a Maya Kekchi Indian appeared at our bush-house at Lubaantun and gravely informed us we should not see him on the morrow, as he was going to die. When he made this announcement he was his usual stolid self, and there appeared to be nothing the matter with him; in fact I am quite sure his health was as good as ours. He left us and went down to the village, where he gave the same message to his friends, who showed no surprise at the news. The man walked to his bush-house and lay on a bed of leaves with his face turned to the wooden wall, and by an unwritten law no one approached him. His woman and children and his friends gathered at the entrance, discussing his coming death quite casually and unconcerned. It was an ordinary event. He was given no food, drink or attention—just left alone; and fatalistically he lay without moving and within twenty-four hours was dead.

We were sure this man was suffering from no illness; he had deliberately willed to die. The same night the death-fire was lit; wrapped in leaves he was buried with all his belongings, the wailing ceremony of farewell broke on the air, and that was the end of the affair.

We were naturally interested in the cause of his death and the reason why he wished to die. The Indians told us that he was just tired, and had had enough of this life, so what was more natural than that he should not want to live any longer?

Having lived for years among Indian tribes, Lady Brown and I have gained considerable insight into their psychology, yet there are still many phases of their mental outlook which must for ever remain a sealed page not only to us but, I believe, to any civilized man.

In the Republic of Honduras nothing will ever surprise me. Although Yucatan is studded with many wonderful

ruins of the Second Maya Empire, and there are ancient sites in British Honduras and Guatemala, it is in Spanish Honduras that I am convinced the most remarkable historical data will be obtained. In this Republic not a great distance from the Guatemalan border lies the ancient Maya city of Copan, and from here have been recovered some exquisite pottery and carved jadeite plaques.¹

All who visit the Museum of the American Indian (Heye Foundation) in New York can see beautiful alabaster vases from the Valley of the Ulua River, while in almost every part of the country that borders the Caribbean, and for a hundred and fifty to two hundred miles inland, burial mounds can be found.

What to-day is impenetrable jungle, mountain, and swamp, almost unpeopled (apart from thousands of square miles of known uninhabited country) was no doubt thickly populated centuries before Christ. A great civilization lived here numbering probably millions. Evidence in support of this can be found everywhere; there is no doubt that the jungles and swamps were fertile fields covered in corn, and I base my belief on the fact that on several occasions we have discovered hills terraced from top to bottom evidently in order that a few more acres might be obtained for cultivation. Land which to-day is derelict and unknown was at that remote period obviously precious, and, analogous to the conditions obtaining in Great Britain at the present time, inadequate for growing sufficient food for the people's needs.

In Honduras a legend is rife of a great white city buried in the heart of that unknown part of the country called the Mosquitia. How it originated I have no idea, yet it persists. There is said to be an ancient city of immense pyramids, temples, and courtyards which gleam like frosted ice in the sunlight. I have tried many times to get definite

¹ These ruins should certainly be preserved, and I believe the Government is doing its best, but it is sad to see the ravages of vandal man on some of the exquisite sculpturing.

information, but when questioned the Indians shut up like clams—it is evil, a place of the dead, a home of ghouls and vampires. To approach means death. The Indians cannot be dissuaded from their fanatical superstition; this is the great barrier to exploration work. Even supposing one located this white city, it would be almost impossible to get natives to penetrate the interior and act as guides. No inducement will overthrow their firmly rooted conviction that if they go there they will die; one cannot convince a native otherwise. He will counter your argument with stories of hunting parties who have entered the jungles and never been seen again, and there is no doubt that in this he is telling the truth. The idea of ascribing their disappearance to evil spirits—well, by people living in civilized countries it would of course be immediately pooh-poohed. But I often wonder.

CHAPTER XXVII

ESOTERIC, QUIÉN SABE?—NATURAL PHENOMENA—WE CATCH A REPTILIAN MONSTROSITY

AT the risk of being thought ridiculous I must confess that Lady Brown and I have had actual demonstrations to which there appears to be no orthodox solution.

It is well known there have been incidents in connection with the excavation of Tut-ankh-Amen's tomb at Luxor that require a great deal of explaining. Possibly they are merely an amazing chain of coincidences, but the natives of Egypt will never believe that the deaths that have taken place were not a direct result of the gods' wrath at the desecration of the tomb.

If one could gather together authentic data from all over the world where excavations have taken place I rather think it would make interesting reading. Although we are both materialists and have never dabbled in the occult, yet events which we have experienced have given us much food for thought.

Who shall explain an episode that occurred to me following an Indian's warning? During our excavation work at Lubaantun several of the Maya Kekchi who were working for us had died, and their deaths were solemnly ascribed to the fact that we were releasing evil spirits from the tombs. I was going up the trail one morning to the ruins when I met an Indian who looked at me strangely, and made known to me that I should beware—that death was even then hovering over me. (Beastly unpleasant—I hated it, knowing that the senses of primitive people are far more acute than our own, and having an uneasy feeling

that he might be psychic.) When I reached the ruins, for some reason I decided to climb one of the pyramids. As usual, I carried my machete—it is the most useful weapon I know for dealing with snakes and scorpions which live in the interstices between the stone blocks. I gained the summit, walked to the edge, and stood looking out over the surrounding country. Without warning an invisible hand seemed to push me from behind, and with a cry I pitched clean over the brink into space. I remember crashing through vegetation and striking the ground below with a thud, after which came oblivion.

Doctor Gann, and Captain T.A. Joyce of the Ethnological Department of the British Museum, who were members of that expedition, had preceded me to the ruins and were excavating close to the pyramid. Attracted by my shout they looked up in time to see me hurtling through the air. They rushed to my assistance, and in a few minutes consciousness returned to me, and except for the shock, although I had fallen sheer for over forty feet, I suffered no ill effects. I was not even bruised, though I might easily have fallen on the machete which was still in my hand when they found me. They could not understand why I had fallen, nor—a greater mystery—why I was unhurt. They told me that as I dived head downwards my shoulder had appeared to touch a projecting block of stone, and I had turned a complete somersault before landing on the ground.

Was the Indian's warning merely a coincidence? Thinking of it afterwards, what exercised me was the fact that he had not said I should die, but that death "hovered over me." His prophecy, therefore, was fulfilled to the letter.

Again; who can solve the weird event that followed when two natives set out in a dug-out to travel a few miles down the Patuca River in the Republic of Honduras? As they left their village the wailing ceremony of farewell,

which takes place only during the burial ritual, broke from the lips of the old witch-doctress—and the two natives were never seen or heard of again. Their empty dug-out was found in the same condition in which it had left the village, the fish-spears and bunches of plantains and their few rude personal effects were still in the boat and undisturbed, but the men had vanished into thin air.

I have been brought face to face with many other seemingly inexplicable happenings. God knows what the answer is.

Time and again Lady Brown and I have laughed at what we have thought were the silly, superstitious fears of the Indians; but, on reflection, had they not some justification? They live in a country where it would take the most erudite scientist all his time to account for many things that occur; but among the strange phenomena there are some which, although appearing as miracles to the natives, are explainable.

At the small village of Yoro in the interior of Honduras, nearly every June (which is the first month of the wet season) swarms of fish, three to seven inches in length, fall from the sky. The natives look forward to this event. The fish, which they collect eagerly, are considered a great delicacy, and are believed to have supernatural healing powers. The occasion is called the "Feast of the Fishes." Believe it or not—go there and see.

There is a scientific explanation to this. At this time of the year great electrical storms break over the country on the advent of the wet season; a violent whirlwind draws up the water from a lake near Yoro and with it these small fish, which in due course fall back again from the clouds. There have been to my knowledge three occurrences similar to this in Great Britain. There was a fall of tiny frogs in Buckinghamshire in 1905, and on several occasions a rain of tadpoles (young toads or frogs in their first state, before the tail is absorbed and the limbs pushed

forth) has fallen in widely separated parts of the world. A shower of little fish occurred in Sunderland in 1925, and another in Ireland in 1927. Apart from falls of fish, frogs, and tadpoles, at infrequent intervals various parts of Europe have experienced red rain—or rather red mud-rain. Such mud-storms have their origin in the tropical deserts of North Africa; enormous quantities of desert dust are whirled up by wind-storms and transported often for thousands of miles in the upper air. On February 21st and 22nd in 1903 a deluge of red rain fell in England, in which it was calculated that no less than ten million tons of dust from northern Africa were deposited in this country alone. At Barcelona (Spain) on November 28th, 1930, a fall of fine red sand occurred, carried from the Sahara Desert, and on the same day in Paris at five o'clock a.m. a rain-cloud burst, sending down streams of liquid mud. In many places half an inch of reddish deposit was seen in the streets; and it must be remembered that this had doubtless been carried from the Sahara Desert in the air, a distance of over fifteen hundred miles, before it met a rain-cloud and then fell onto the city.

A zone in the Caribbean Sea which bears an unenviable reputation for hurricanes can produce, during the height of a cyclonic disturbance, whirlwinds that have caused terrible destruction, demolishing towns with serious loss of life. There is a doggerel known to all sea-faring men in that part of the world :

“ July, stand by;
August, you must;
September, remember;
October, all over.”

This substantially covers the hurricane period.

These visitations are dreaded by the islanders of Porto Rico, Jamaica, San Domingo, Turks Island, and Cuba, and embrace at irregular intervals the Bahamas, the coast of

Florida, and as far north as Bermuda. I well recollect the captain of a passenger boat telling me of his experiences when his vessel was caught in the path of one of these frightful storms. I watched his hands clench as the scene came vividly back to him.

"Everything was black as night," he declared. "The world had gone mad; it was a roaring, raging hell; there were dead birds, pieces of wood, palm-branches and a whole mass of debris whirling round and flying through the air. How the ship lived through it was a miracle. The lifeboats were smashed to pieces, ventilators carried away, and so terrific was the motion of the boat that the iron safe was torn from its bed and hurled through the side of the purser's office."

It is obvious that in a region like this, where storms of such violence occur and hurricanes are almost a yearly event, where earthquakes are common and a chain of volcanoes is always in a state of greater or lesser activity, it would be strange if there were not phenomena unknown to countries not subjected to these cataclysmic convulsions.

It is the vast difference between Europe and Central America that has attracted Lady Brown and myself. It is really another world. Apart from the ruins of ancient civilizations, Indians, and scenery, during our exploration work in the Republic of Honduras, we have always been lured by its strange reptilian and other animal life. But the most curious creature we ever found was a species of turtle that appeared to be in a grotesque stage of either evolution or devolution. It is difficult to describe this monstrosity accurately.

We had arrived at a lagoon of some size on the Caribbean side of the Republic when first we saw these strange creatures. We were most anxious to secure several and keep them alive for presentation to the Zoological Society in London, but how to do it was the problem.

We managed to get a dug-out; and with an Indian we

pushed out from the shore and crept along in the shallows close to the edge of the lagoon in which these hideous reptiles live. Among a tangle of roots, trunks, and branches that had fallen from the bank into the water we saw several turtles within a few minutes. We tried with sticks to drive them into the bank, and attempted other methods, all without result. Even if we had been successful, I could think of no way of getting them into the dug-out. To lift them with our hands was out of the question; the vicious creatures are much too dangerous to handle.

"Look at that brute," Lady Brown cried excitedly, as a snakey head appeared above the water within a few feet of us. "It's laughing at us." And it was enough to irritate a saint.

"I give it up," I said. "Damn them—how the devil can you catch a thing when there's nothing to catch it with? We want nets."

"You sweet-tempered dear; I always thought you knew something about fishing."

"What the blazes has this got to do with fishing?" I retorted, completely losing my temper. "You seem to imagine turtles are fish."

"But you've always told me you understood something about fishology," she persisted, laughing.

"It's ichthyology," I exploded. "Who ever heard of 'fishology'!"

"For goodness' sake try to control yourself." Seeing I was annoyed, she attempted a dose of soothing syrup. "I'm quite sure if you think for a few minutes you'll discover a way."

Man is always susceptible to flattery, and being no exception I calmed down somewhat, scheming and cudgeling my brains and suggesting ideas which I now know were infantile. Having spent ten minutes in talking tosh, during which Lady Brown sat listening with a look of admiration—that artificial look which really masks derision

—I reached the end of my suggestions, and also my endurance, perfectly aware that I was being laughed at.

"Why the devil don't you think of something?" I exclaimed.

"I have."

"Well, why didn't you say so? Let's hear."

"Why not ask the Indian?" she ventured.

It is extraordinary how one never thinks of the obvious.

"Of course."

If our native, who lived on the borders of the lagoon, could not catch these imps of Acheron, that was the end of the matter, and we might as well give it up. I turned to him and made known what we had been trying to do—which he must have seen already. There was of course an easy way; and the credit of capturing several, as we ultimately did, was entirely due to him, proving that the native mind, certainly in this respect, was superior to our ignorance. At first he only smiled, no doubt supremely disdainful of our helplessness; and I was so angry I could have knocked him overboard when he explained how simple it was. Why had he let me struggle and get drenched to the skin when all the while he must have known my efforts were ridiculous?

He begged from us about six yards of ordinary string. I always carry this most necessary article, and I handed it over. At one end he attached a thin stick of rounded wood—a twig cut from a tree, about eight inches long, and returning to the shore went to his hut and came back with several pieces of raw meat. One of these he tied firmly to the middle of the stick, and, still smiling, rejoined us in the dug-out and paddled a little way up the lagoon, where he tied the boat to the roots of a tree at the water's edge; then threw out the bait close inshore.

In less than five minutes a reptilian head protruded and began to glide through the water towards the piece of meat wrapped round the stick. The creature's neck shot out,

the jaws opened and seized the bait. Then ensued a tug of war. The turtle refused to let go, hanging on with bull-dog tenacity. Instead of its friends and relatives being scared away by the splashing and noise, several more of the brutes arrived and tried to tear the tit-bit from the jaws of the lucky (?) one.

Slowly the struggling reptile was hauled towards the boat. Right against the side it came, still hanging on like grim death; then leaning down the Indian seized his broad flat paddle, and dexterously slipping it under its belly with his right hand, held the string with his left and lifted the creature with one heave clean out of the water. It dropped with a thud into the boat, its jaws wide open and its legs, which terminated in strong claws, tearing at the sides and bottom—twenty pounds of concentrated rage. The rapid way it moved was a revelation—and the native's feet were naked! That Indian never waited a minute. He made a wild dive along the dug-out, grabbed the roots of the tree to which it was tied, and hauled himself up the bank, leaving us alone with the infuriated turtle. We both jumped up so suddenly that the rickety craft nearly overturned. We looked at the savage reptile—and it looked at us; there was no mistaking its intentions. We could, of course, have killed it with ease, but that was the last thing we wanted to do. Its paroxysm of rage ceased as with a cold malignance it started to move slowly towards us. Just as we were thinking it might be wise to join the Indian on land, he reappeared, still with that fixed smile, and carrying a length of liana which he had twisted into a loop. Cautiously he stepped into the dug-out, his eyes on the turtle, and with native dexterity cast the noose round the creature's outstretched neck and jerked it tight. Throwing the end of the line for us to hold so that the head was held away from him, he grabbed the back-shell, then with his knee pressed the turtle down hard on the bottom of the boat while he tied its legs.

We—or rather the Indian—had captured our first alligator-turtle; and continuing the good work were finally able to land several more.

It is a long way from a lagoon in the Republic of Honduras to the Zoological Society's reptile house in London; but after a voyage of some thousands of miles two finally arrived there, where one is still living, and I believe has made great friends with his keeper, who calls him Tommy. He has even learned to do tricks, and at the rattling of a bunch of keys will leap towards them, and the snap of his jaws is eloquent of what he could do to one's finger. The other turtle unfortunately died of pneumonia, but the Zoological Society had him carefully preserved for me.

At a lecture I gave recently in the Engineers' Hall, New York, to the Fellows of the American Geographical Society, I described an extraordinary looking creature we had found in a lagoon in Spanish Honduras.

"This monstrosity," I said, "from the tip of the tail to the head, was about two and a half feet long. It had an abnormally thick carapace on top, while the shell beneath, unlike that of most other turtles, had practically disappeared. Its long snakey neck was approximately the same length, when outstretched, as its back-shell. It had the eyes of a snake, set close together, and a tremendously powerful beak-like mouth, something like a parrot's. Its legs were like those of an alligator, terminating in immensely strong claws, while the tail which protruded from its shell was horned and serrated, also like a saurian's. Altogether it resembled nothing on earth. For its size its strength was remarkable, and it could spring from the ground and with one vicious snap of its beak not only crush a finger-bone but even sever it."

The hall was packed with people. Smiles and looks of incredulity were on many faces, and suppressed "Oh's" rose from one or two of the audience. Already I was condemned as a prevaricator of the first degree, which was

what I expected; and, if I must confess it, I had deliberately drawn them on. In anticipation I had brought the mounted turtle with me, and now produced the indisputable evidence. Later a battery of cameras was focused on the curiosity, and next day in the American newspapers its picture appeared. For some reason the press declared that Lady Brown had christened this poor old turtle "Albert"—a little fiction on their part. A certain paper went one better, showing a cartoon of an intoxicated man who, returning home at night and suddenly being confronted with the grotesque animal, imagined he had delirium tremens and fled in panic.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE INDISCRETION OF A SAVANT—VENGEANCE

IN penetrating the jungles of the Republic of Honduras, we have seen creatures, apart from that abnormality, the alligator-turtle, so grotesque that we might have been back in the Jurassic period. Anyone who has been fortunate enough to watch, as we have done, the great ant-eater crossing a stream will understand my meaning. Can the imagination conceive a more crazily designed monstrosity? But it has been our good fortune to discover, in a totally uninhabited region of the republic, a leviathan that is a sheer anachronism in this present age and world. I do not propose to state where we came across this living nightmare, but will only add that we captured it and with the help of the gang of natives we had with us roped it up and photographed it, after which we let it go and filmed the colossus as it lumbered off. There are others in the same locality. At the moment I am planning to return and bring one alive to New York or London, though it will require a crane to move it.

Many of the little-known rivers and primeval jungles of Honduras teem with life. Lord of the predatory beasts is the jaguar, while that strange-looking animal, the tapir, is abundant in places. The latter, which I should call a huge water-hog, must spend a miserable life, for he is the *pièce de résistance* of the jaguar. While the tapir is asleep in the dense bush, the great cat will silently stalk him, and he will be aroused from his contented slumbers by the jaguar leaping upon his back which it immediately begins to rend and tear terribly. Usually the tapir makes his

lair where the bamboos or prickly thorn-bushes grow densely, and we often wondered why he should choose surroundings that appear so unfitted for his bulk rather than the more open swampy country. But we recently understood the reason: the bamboos and thickly-growing tangle of thorny trees and bush are his greatest defence against his most deadly of all enemies. Immediately he is attacked, head down he plunges through the bush, bursting it asunder by sheer bulk and strength, and the jaguar more often than not is in this way torn from his back by the branches. At least in this the tapir shows intelligence; otherwise he is a stupid beast, spending his time wallowing in the shallow water on the edge of river or lagoon and revelling in the warm mud and sunshine.

Although I have done quite a good deal of big-game hunting in the past years, it has now become distasteful to me. Alligators and sharks I will butcher as and whenever I can; but, although sometimes very much tempted, the tapir and many other animals I feel incapable of slaughtering except when urgently needing food. It was for this reason I killed the tapir in the photograph,* though in the circumstances I was rather glad, because the poor creature had been so badly torn and lacerated by a jaguar that he must have been suffering great pain when my bullet put an end to his misery.

While we were in Tegucigalpa, the President and Government officials, the American Minister and British Chargé d'Affaires all went out of their way to make our visit a memorable one. Their courtesy and hospitality were overwhelming.

Living there, with dancing and bridge, parties and picnics, it was incredible that we stood on civilization's edge; but we always remembered that it was the land of the gun, and the people were no respecters of persons. There are certain codes and conventions to which everyone

* See photograph facing p. 160.

must rigidly adhere. To kiss a girl is an everyday occurrence at home, and in these days in the majority of cases really means nothing. But in Honduras it is very different, as an extremely well-known American professor discovered

He was at the head of an expedition in the Republic under the auspices of a foremost scientific institution in the States, when through thoughtlessness he had an experience which, I imagine, he will never forget; in fact he came within an ace of death.

He undertook the greatest gamble of his life when he became enamoured of one of the daughters of the Republic. I believe she was very lovely and very seductive. It was all quite innocent; the heavily scented night, warm sensuous air, stars hanging low in the sky, droning orchestration of cicadas, the girl and (not a scientist, but) a very human man with their arms around one another—and a kiss. I can well imagine what that kiss was like, for the tropics are made for fire and passion, and a girl out here can be a very responsive, lovable creature.

Oblivious to everything they imagined they were quite alone. But they were observed. Later my friend the professor strolled away, in romantic mood, and walked to the end of a crazy little wooden pier running out into the sea, where he stood alone gazing into the unfathomable night. Absorbed in thought he heard no footsteps, but suddenly he felt a hand upon his shoulder, and turning, found himself faced by the girl's brother.

"You have done my family much honour, Señor. To-morrow let us all meet and discuss the marriage."

"Marriage!" ejaculated the professor with a gasp, as he realized to what the other was alluding. "But good god, man, I am already married."

There was a silence which could be felt, to be broken by a choking sob from the Spaniard, who shook with emotion while the tears ran down his cheeks.

"Señor," he cried, "I have ~~loved~~ loved you as a brother. I

have looked up to you, you have received the hospitality of my home. But in spite of the fact that you are my friend whom I love, the insult you have offered my family can only be wiped out in one way." Here his emotion almost overcame him. "Señor, I must kill you."

"You must what?" exclaimed the startled scientist. In a hapless tone, and almost incoherent with grief, the words were reiterated.

"I must kill you, Señor. Even though I love you and my heart will break to see you die, yet it must be done. Honour demands it." And the words were accompanied by the drawing from his belt of a large, pearl-handled six-shooter.

The professor realized his position was desperate. Putting his arm round the other's shoulders, he did his best to pacify him.

"Let us talk this over," he said, all the while slowly drawing his reluctant enemy along the pier towards the shore. Several times the gun was raised, but on each occasion the wit of the man of science averted death. Finally, talking all the way, they gained the land. No sooner had his feet touched terra firma than the professor ran as he had never run before. Enraged at the trick which had been played upon him, the Spaniard fired. Two shots rang out and the bullets whistled past my erudite friend; but in the darkness, and owing to the zigzag manner in which he ran, he was untouched. He redoubled his efforts, racing through the little town onto the deck and gaining the gangway of a steamer anchored there, with the Spaniard, foaming with rage, hard on his heels. He reached the deck of the boat.

"Stop him!" he gasped. "He will kill me!" And the would-be avenger found his way barred by several sailors and two customs officers, who remain day and night at the foot of the gangplank of all steamers docking in the Republic. The professor's life was saved by a hair's

breadth. I believe to this day he has never returned to that Republic; I don't think somehow he believes a kiss to be worth a bullet.

When he reads this, as he is sure to do, he will probably anathematize me for daring to mention the incident. I would not give him away for worlds, but I picture the situation—the erudite scientist, the last person one would dream of ever becoming involved in a dangerous *amour*, dashing through the dark pursued by an infuriated Spaniard thirsting for his blood.

In this case all ended well by sheer luck; but very different was a terrible drama of which I was an actual spectator.

I was seated in the patio of a hotel. It was terribly hot and I was absorbing my third glass of orangeade with a very close friend of mine, who was madly in love with the only woman in the world—his Maria. He spoke English perfectly, and we always conversed in that language.

Our talk had drifted to the eternal feminine. Topics of conversation in Central America are rather limited, and usually confined to revolutions past, present, or future, politics, and women. I had been expatiating on the beauty and delightful personality of a certain General's daughter known to both of us, when my companion suddenly jumped up, and with the impulsiveness of his quick Latin temperament, said:

“ You have never met my Maria, M-H. Come, you must.”

I admit I was curious to see the marvellous creature who had completely subjugated my friend's every other thought. He was not a susceptible man; in fact I never met one less so. By nature and disposition he was a fighter, a man of blood and iron, hard and ruthless to a degree, as had recently been proved in the revolution which had convulsed the country. He was a true son of the Republic, with the emotional nature of his race.

The idea once having entered his head that I must meet

his innamorata, he was all impatience, and I had scarcely time to finish my drink before he seized my arm and hurried me from the hotel.

The majority of houses in the city of which I speak, like many other towns in the Republics, are of only one storey, the entrance to living-rooms and bedrooms opening onto the street. Shortly we stopped before a small residence, and my guide was all excitement. He knocked at the door calling softly, "Maria, Maria! It is your Julio." There was no answer. He waited a moment or two, then rapped more loudly.

"Maria! Maria! Open—it is your Julio!" And a light shone steadily through the crevices of the shuttered windows. The excitement of my fiery friend was turning to anger. Peremptorily he hammered again.

"Open to me at once, Maria—at once, I say. It is Julio!" Still silence. A minute or two must have elapsed, then came the sound of a bolt being withdrawn, and the wooden door slowly opened. Julio strode into the room; I followed feeling damned uncomfortable and scenting trouble. The girl stood trembling, with averted eyes, clad only in a thin night-dress. About to embrace her, my friend suddenly stopped, looked at her, then glanced across at the bed in the corner and noted its rumpled condition. The girl shivered violently, but not a word escaped her. The most unobservant would have seen the guilt written on her face. My friend's eyes travelled round the room taking in every detail. The goddess of fate had indeed been unkind, for the lover of the girl, who had just left by the back window, had in his haste forgotten his belt which was lying on a chair, and there were other unmistakable signs.

Julio came close to the trembling girl, towering over her with an awful look of ferocity on his face and hell blazing from his eyes. And so they stood for perhaps a minute.

I was paralysed; I knew that within a matter of seconds

a horrible tragedy would be enacted in front of me. No word passed between the man and girl. Then like lightning, at the very moment when I had pulled myself together, but before I could intervene, his gun flashed out. Close to her head he levelled it and pulled the trigger. Simultaneously with the deafening report the girl collapsed on the floor, while her blood and brains bespattered the wall.

I stood turned to stone. Expressionless, Julio addressed me. The man I had known only a short time before as we sat in the hotel had disappeared—his voice, his face had changed completely.

"Pardon me, Señor," he said. "I must leave you. It is not finished."

I returned alone to the hotel, shaken and sick at heart, knowing that before many hours had passed the tragedy would be completed, and another life would pay the price of treachery.

I met Julio again recently in the capital of another Republic. He had aged terribly, and was no longer my old excitable friend. I could not help feeling that all the love and trust of which this cold, hard fighting man was capable had been given to the girl he had ruthlessly killed. As once before we had sat in a hotel, so we now reclined in easy chairs at the club. He looked across at me, and the same thought must have come to both of us, for, unexpectedly, he remarked,

"You remember Maria, M-H.?" His voice shook, and tears slowly rolled down his cheeks. And I understood.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE NAVAL REVIEW

HAVING accumulated a considerable amount of the information necessary to plans for the future, and having obtained the good wishes and promise of co-operation from the Government for our next expedition, the time came to bid adieu to Tegucigalpa. His Excellency, Dr. Pas Barona, had done all in his power to render us assistance, and I shall always retain my impression of him as he walked with us down the steps of the palace and from the entrance waved us farewell while the presidential guards stood to attention.

After an uneventful journey we again reached San Lorenzo. Here the Government launch was waiting for us, and once more we travelled across the Gulf of Fonseca, arriving at Amapala without incident, and were welcomed by the officials there.

The Republic of Nicaragua was our immediate objective, and remembering the warning we had received in San Salvador I caused the most energetic enquiries to be made regarding the possibility of a revolutionary outbreak. But the secret, if any, was very closely guarded, or else our friends in El Salvador had discovered a mare's nest. The fact remains that the only news I could glean was that Nicaragua was in a state of absolute tranquillity. The officials at Amapala averred that not only was there no sign of an outbreak, but trade was improving and the people for the first time for years seemed to be perfectly contented. We were more than perplexed, faced by diametrically opposite reports. There was no question

that the officials were sincere; at the same time, as I stressed repeatedly to Lady Brown, our American friends in El Salvador should have known, and had certainly not been pulling our legs.

"They must have made a mistake, or perhaps the trouble has blown over," she suggested hopefully. "And I particularly want to go by the Gulf and land route." But I doggedly refused, an insistent instinct warning me that there was a nigger in the fence somewhere, and that there were solid reasons for the advice we had received.

"Remember; with all revolutions it is the bolt from the blue that brings success. Until the final preparations are complete nothing leaks out. The *coup d'état* must be swift and sudden. You don't realize," I continued, "the frightful position you would be in if we landed in the wild Chinandega region of Nicaragua at the moment trouble broke out." And I closed the argument by flatly stating that nothing would induce me to travel to the adjoining Republic except by the Pacific Steam Navigation boat which should be calling at Amapala early next morning.

But though we were up early and waiting there was no sign of a boat, which was no surprise to us, as the time schedule of the little steamships that call at all the ports along the west coast was very elastic. Later we wandered down to the end of the wooden pier. The Gulf lay shimmering and unrippled in the sun—a trap for the unwary, as we discovered subsequently. As we returned to the place where we were staying it was amusing to watch the soldiers strolling along the street into the plaza, dragging their muskets behind them. Arriving there they dropped these ancient weapons on the ground and began throwing stones at the almond trees. When they had collected sufficient nuts, and having wearied of this amusement, they all sat down in the shade and played cards until dusk.

There was still no sign of the boat, which meant another night in our rather primitive quarters, so we retired. It

must have been about one o'clock in the morning when I was aroused by an agitated voice calling from the other room. I ran in. Although there is hardly anything my companion will not face she is terrified of rats. And in this old Spanish house there were dozens of them. No sooner had Lady Brown dropped off to sleep than she was awakened by numbers of the creatures running round the room and even onto the mosquito net. The climax came when somehow one by accident got under the net and onto her bed, and finding itself unable to get out, began rushing madly backwards and forwards in an endeavour to escape. Almost petrified, at last in a frenzy she flung herself out on the floor, calling for me. As soon as I had made a light the rats scuttled off in all directions.

With perspiration streaming down her face, white with fear, Lady Brown looked round and picked up a towel. Just as she was going to use it to wipe away the sweat, I noticed something black, and yelled out, "Drop it—quick!"

Startled, she let it fall. In the nick of time I had noticed a large scorpion had chosen the towel for a resting-place. I smashed it with one of her top-boots, and taking the lamp, looked round the room.

"All clear," I said contentedly; but as I spoke she pointed to the mosquito net over her bed—there was yet one more, which had evidently fallen from the roof onto the top of the mosquito bar, and was now crawling down the side of the net. There was no sleep that night, and by the time day broke, what with rats, scorpions, mosquitoes, a plague of sand-flies and one thing and another, we felt decidedly cheap. But a cold shower revived us. Most of the houses in Central American towns have these conveniences—they are rigged up very simply; a pipe juts out overhead, with a spray attached. A tap is turned on and the water pours down over one onto the stones, running away to soak in the earth,

After breakfast, having nothing to do we again wandered into the town. The Gulf, with the mountain range on the mainland across the bay, the beautiful little green islands rising from the placid blue water, the tiny wooden pier and the place itself all reminded me of an incident that took place a year or two before in this part of the World.

I had been on a minor scouting expedition to glean information for a more ambitious project to follow. Arriving in the capital I found that the Government had changed since I was there last, and the President, Minister of War and Marine, Minister of Agriculture, and other officials were old friends of mine, and my visit there synchronized with an epoch-making national demonstration. This was nothing more or less than a review of the fleet, which important and necessary function had been decided upon by the new Government. I was more than surprised when this astounding news was revealed to me; I must confess that until then I had no idea a navy had been acquired. The one and only newspaper had placarded the city with news of the great event, and extraordinary pride and fervour were everywhere apparent. The night after my arrival the Minister of War and Marine called upon me in person.

"You will, of course, accompany us?" he said. "We leave for the coast at six o'clock to-morrow morning for the review."

I was itching to ask where and when the Republic had acquired the cruisers, battle-ships, and whatever else were going to be inspected; but knowing how touchy these people are on such matters, discreetly restrained my curiosity. At six the next day, therefore, I joined the officials and we left for a certain port.

When we arrived there we were met by the Commandante, resplendant in a blue uniform with much gold braid, and, preceded by the principal personages of the little town and a guard of fifteen ragged soldiers armed with the most obsolete weapons it has ever been my lot to see,

we started for a small wooden pier which ran out into the sea for a distance of not more than fifty yards. Behind straggled the entire population of the town. We walked to the end of the jetty—that is to say, we, the sacrosanct, did, together with fourteen of our escort. The fifteenth remained to prevent the natives from swarming onto the rickety structure which more probably than not would have collapsed; as it was it swayed alarmingly under our weight. The fourteen soldiers, after much explanation as to their duties, were drawn up in line, whereupon a tinny warble broke on the air from a very ancient and battered bugle. This was repeated three times, when every head was bared as the Minister of War and Marine stood forward and delivered an impassioned oration.

During the whole of this time I had been looking round for the fleet, expecting at any moment to see it steam into the bay. But there was no sign of a man-of-war or any other vessel as far as the eye could reach.

The speech of the Minister ended in enthusiastic cheering, and it was now the Commandante's turn to address the fourteen decrepit warriors and ourselves.

Still in vain I searched for the elusive fleet. The harangue of the Commandante having at last wearily wound its way to a conclusion, I walked to the end of the pier and looked down. There I saw an old and weather-beaten motor-boat containing two dark-skinned natives who were working furiously to start the engine. But though they laboured and sweated, not a spark of life did that ancient piece of machinery display.

The Minister of War and Marine, the Commandante, and other dignitaries now joined me, all gazing expectantly at the motor-boat. Frantically the men worked, but after an hour it was plain that the engine was too far gone ever to throb again. In response to authoritative commands a *cayuca* (dug-out) put off from the beach manned by four natives. They paddled out,

and the launch was hitched to its stern and towed about fifty yards from the end of the pier, where the men in the *gasolina* anchored it by dropping a large stone tied to a rope into the shallow water.

Light broke upon me. This was the fleet. Immediately the "anchor" had fallen everybody raised their hats. Again the tinny blast broke three times from the battered bugle; the soldiers presented arms at any and every angle while the crowd on shore cheered their loudest. Then all the spectators turned expectantly towards the great hill at whose foot the little town nestled—but nothing happened. Time passed; we stood waiting, and still nothing happened.

Having recovered from my astonishment I was prepared to see and believe anything, though what the hill was expected to produce was beyond me. Then I saw something moving down the side which, as it came nearer, turned out to be a man. He gained the town and came running towards the pier—he was obviously a news-bearer of the greatest importance.

I must explain that generations ago a cannon, one of the old muzzle-loaders dating back to the time of the Spanish galleons, had been planted on the side of the hill; and it had been decided that on this momentous occasion it should be utilized for the purpose of saluting the fleet. Thus it was that all heads had turned towards the hill, the spectators anticipating that a volley would thunder forth. Ambitious though the project was, the chief necessity had escaped the minds of those responsible—they had no gunpowder. That is what the ill-omened native was now volubly explaining to the Minister of War and Marine.

But were they discouraged? Were they going to be thwarted? A thousand times no! The fleet had been reviewed; the dignity and honour of the Republic must be upheld, and a salute had to be fired. Scouts were immediately despatched, and from somewhere in the town about half a dozen rockets were unearthed and carried up the

hill, where ultimately several of them managed to rise into the air and explode. Again all heads were bared; again the discordant strains arose from the bugle, once more the soldiers saluted, and the Minister of War and Marine, together with the other Government officials, walked in state along the pier to the shore, to be hailed with joyful acclamations from the assembled populace.

But if the great review had been a fiasco (though probably I was the only one who thought so) the feast that followed was not. Central American Republics may not have the armaments of the powers, but in many ways they could give us points in the art of living.

CHAPTER XXX

CHUQUESANA—THE REPUBLIC OF NICARAGUA—IS THERE TROUBLE?

BUT to return to Amapala. Although it was delightful to look out over the Gulf, which would put the Bay of Naples in the shade for beauty, what we desired was to see our ship arrive. Just when we were reconciling ourselves to the prospect of another night in our unpleasant, rat-ridden zoo, smoke showed on the horizon. We went again to the end of the pier and stood shading our eyes from the dazzling sunshine as we gazed anxiously across the water. Then, all of a sudden as if switched off, the sun vanished. We had been so engrossed in watching the approach of the boat that we had not noticed the astonishing change which had taken place in the weather. On the mainland, and stretching across the bay in our direction, the heavens were blue-black, and bearing down directly on Amapala rushed the dreaded *chuquesana*. I grabbed Lady Brown by the arm.

"Run like the devil!" I shouted. But as we gained the shore the first warning puff, cold as ice, struck us. I could hear a faint moaning, ever growing louder.

"Can you hear it? That's wind coming. Can't you move faster?" In my anxiety to reach our quarters before the storm broke my grip on my companion's arm had, I fear, become vice-like. She stopped dead and wrenched herself away, panting, "You're nearly breaking my arm."

"Nonsense," I answered. Then added brusquely, "We've no time to argue—come on or you'll be drenched."

"I'd rather get wet through," she retorted, "than have my arm broken."

"Now, have I got to stand here listening to you until the storm breaks? You'd make a saint swear!"

"Have I asked you to remain?" I seized her wrist and in spite of her anger dragged her along.

The wind had now risen to gale force, and the forerunners of the deluge, great drops of rain the size of a fifty-cent piece, began to fall. This spur made her take to her heels—it was more effective than any argument.

One hundred yards remained between us and sanctuary. I was hoping we should make it in time, when, as if the bottom had fallen out of a tank, with a hissing roar a flood of water descended. My baleful prophecy was fulfilled; soaked through would be a mild way of expressing our condition. We had scarcely gained the house when Lady Brown turned on me furiously.

"This is all your fault. You saw the storm coming and kept me on that pier."

"Well, of all——!" I couldn't go on—perhaps it was just as well. I burst out laughing.

It is funny how sometimes when one is angry a sense of the ridiculous will appeal. I don't know why, but it suddenly struck me that she looked just like a drowned relation of the rats that had played leapfrog on her bed the night before. The wind had made havoc of her hair and the rain had completed the picture so that it hung like the tails of the rodents she loathed. Water was trickling down her face from the tangled maze above. My merriment was the last straw; she gave me one parting shot (I didn't hear what it was, but I know it was not a term of endearment), dashed into her room and slammed the door.

"You'd better hurry and pack your things," I shouted after her, but was answered by a large silence.

For three hours the storm raged, then cleared as quickly as it had started, and without delay our baggage was carried by natives down to a waiting lighter. The steamship was now lying anchored some distance off-shore, and

we had hardly reached our cabins when another tornado broke, the hurricane fury of the wind exceeding the first visitation. Its violence was terrifying and the roar deafening. It was nearly dark, but we could see through our portholes that several dug-outs and a motor-boat that had been anchored about fifty yards out had dragged and been driven ashore, where they were being pounded and smashed by the breakers. I was just wondering if the ship would follow suit, when Lady Brown said,

"This is awful. I wonder if the boat's all right?"

We had gone up into the little smoke-room, and even as she spoke the siren sounded.

"The captain's not taking any chances—we're off," I replied. But the anchor was scarcely up when once again a sudden calm fell and the torrential rain stopped, and we crept out between the little islands for the open sea, rolling on our way to Corinto.

The sun had just risen and we stood on deck as our boat steamed into a natural harbour—the devil of a place for navigation, as the tide runs through the narrow entrance like a millrace.

"That's Corinto ahead," I said pointing. "One of the hottest places I've ever struck, as you'll doubtless discover for yourself."

No sooner had we docked than we found that all arrangements had been made to convey us to Managua, the capital. A special coach was waiting, and by orders of the President, Major Clay, formerly of the United States but now in command of the national guard of Corinto, had been detailed to look after us. His men transported our luggage to the train, an ample luncheon-basket was provided, and we left for the interior. Major Clay, who on further acquaintance proved to be one of the best, and three fully-armed soldiers came with us.

"I can see no signs of any trouble," Lady Brown remarked as we passed through the depot at Chinandega.

"Though it does seem curious that an officer and men, armed to the teeth, should be travelling with us. Let's ask Major Clay if there's any reason for it."

A little later as we sat in the arm-chairs with which the coach was provided, I broached the subject to him, casually enquiring,

"There's no unrest in the capital, I suppose, Major?" He looked at me rather queerly.

"Now I wonder what makes you ask?"

"Well," I replied, "I was rather curious to know why you and your men were escorting us."

"Oh, you must thank the President for that," he answered laughing. "We had a message that some very special visitors were arriving, with instructions to look after them and do all we could to make their journey comfortable."

"I'm sure we're greatly honoured. I didn't think we were so important," I rejoined.

He smiled.

"You know you're pretty well known in Central America, especially since your amazing adventure in the Chucunaque country where you turned up a race of Indians nobody knew anything about, not to mention those great ruins you found in British Honduras. It's understandable why you do these things," he went on, addressing me, "but I don't know how a lady can stand the roughing and the climate." Here he bowed to my companion. He amused us rather when he added, "I pictured Lady Brown as a masculine type of woman standing about five feet ten."

She laughed.

"I hope I don't look very man-like," she said. "And I am only five feet three. I do it because I like it. A big city is all very well for a few weeks, but to live in—never. I am happiest when I'm in the jungle, and one of the most wonderful times I ever had was when I lived among the San Blas and Chucunaque Indians. Now tell me," she

continued persuasively, "Do you think there's going to be trouble here?"

I was watching him carefully. For a minute or two he made no reply, but seemed to be debating with himself whether he should or should not say something. Then, evidently making up his mind, he said quite seriously,

"Do you know, I have a hunch that there's a whole lot going on under the surface, but what or where it is I can't find out. I can only tell you—and this is in confidence—my forces have been doubled in Corinto, and the Government seems to be taking extraordinary precautions. I'm from the United States, as you probably know," he continued. "And although I hold a major's rank in the Nicaraguan army and am glad to be here, yet a Yankee will never understand the Latin American."

By the time we had finished a good lunch with a bottle or two of excellent dry champagne which, joy of joys, had come straight off the ice (I have always wondered where the latter was procured) such things as revolutions were incidents too trivial to worry us.

We stopped at Leon, a town of some importance, and on Lady Brown expressing a wish to see the city the train was shunted onto a siding and we left on a tour of inspection. Leon is quite a large place, and has one of the finest cathedrals I have ever seen. During revolutions in the past this building has served other purposes than that of a house of God; at these stirring times the cathedral roof, owing to its spaciousness and formation, has been more than once used for growing vegetables. It is a sleepy old town with more *cantinas* per square acre than any other place I know. Although they don't look like it, the citizens must have an abnormal capacity for drink if the number of bars is any criterion. We quickly discovered that Leon was the stronghold of the Liberals, who were anti-Government, and it was here that for the first time we felt certain the warning we had received in El Salvador

was based on fact. There was an undoubted air of unrest, indefinable but persistent; knots of men talking together in subdued voices and even in whispers; in the *cantinas* little groups sitting round the tables, heads close together, spoke of trouble.

When we returned to the railroad we discussed this with Major Clay who had accompanied us on our trip through the town.

"That's exactly what I told you," he said. "There's something going on, but one can't find out just what it is."

But our thoughts were quickly diverted to the panorama. The scenery all along the railroad was intensely interesting; predominant in grandeur was the view of the crater Apollo. Once it was a volcano—to-day it is a lake of the most glorious blue, reported to be of unfathomable depth.

We pulled into Managua about five o'clock to be met by the British Chargé d'Affaires, Mr. Patteson, who drove us to the hotel, and later on we went over to the Legation for cocktails with him. We were curious to know his feelings in regard to the President. He was most enthusiastic, and we gleaned that His Excellency was a strong and at the same time extremely likable man.

"But you will see for yourselves to-morrow, for he is most anxious to meet you," Mr. Patteson remarked.

"And we shall be more than glad to be able to thank him personally for his great kindness in the way we have been received in the Republic," I said.

Our subsequent meeting with the President, General Emiliano Chamorro, was the beginning of a friendship which I hope will always continue. The interest he took in our work, and his kindness, were unbounded. His car was placed at our disposal and was taken advantage of nearly every day by Lady Brown; and the dinner and reception he gave for us at the palace were an event to be remembered. He had arranged that we should be the last to arrive, and we were ceremoniously introduced to all the

assembled guests, with whom we sat on the veranda in a large circle, where cocktails were served.

The President then gave his arm to Lady Brown and stood aside, while his wife and I led the way to the dining-hall. Masses of pink and dark-red roses were banked everywhere. On our entrance the Government band struck up, and altogether it was a most impressive affair. The epicurean dinner which followed could have been provided only by a chef who was a master of the culinary art. Afterwards we danced and chatted; there was no ostentation—its very simplicity was more dignified than the display at a social function I attended recently in New York, which was advertised in the press as having cost a quarter of a million dollars. As we drove back to our hotel that night, Lady Brown murmured sleepily, but happily,

“There’s only one Central America, eh?” I agreed. They are great countries, a great people, with a great future.

Our time in Managua was so very much occupied, and we had so many invitations that it looked as if we should never be able to leave and travel farther afield. But we tore ourselves away for a short while, with difficulty. We were very anxious to examine and photograph the lake that was once the crater Apollo, and were fortunate in that the weather remained remarkably dry for the time of year. In due course we reached the locality which we had seen previously from the railroad. We had wondered whether distance had lent beauty to the view, but a closer inspection proved this Elysian spot to be lovely beyond expression. I cannot attempt to describe the colour of the water; it was so vividly exquisite that no pen or painter’s brush could possibly give a true idea of its beauty and colouring. The scenic effects of the cliffs, which nearly all around drop sheer to the water’s edge and are mirrored in the lake, must be seen to be realized. There is a legend that in one place on the rocky walls are ancient paintings and sculpturing,

but this I think can be dismissed as mythical. A careful examination revealed no sign of them; neither, apparently, were the natives living in the vicinity, who knew every inch of the district, able to supply a clue.

As we stood on the brink and looked down, the history that untold ages ago the lake was a crater had ample verification, for such it undoubtedly must have been. We could understand the report that the depth was unfathomable; I should imagine there is very little doubt about it. God knows how far down into the earth that great hole extends.

Speaking with little geological knowledge, the impression I had was that it must have been millions of years ago that this crater was active—probably long before the Pekin man (who is perhaps the oldest of our ancestors) ever trod the earth.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE SEVEN CRATERS OF SANTIAGO—I SWEAT WITH FEAR

IT was the day after our return from the crater of Apollo. Lady Brown was feeling rather under the weather; her trouble was not difficult to diagnose—a slight attack of malaria.

"I'd stay in bed if I were you, and dose yourself with quinine," I said. "It's a beastly nuisance, but it can't be helped."

"I suppose I must," she murmured miserably.

I made her as comfortable as I could, and told her I had to run out for a little while as I particularly wanted to go round to the British Legation. "There's some information I'm keen on getting if possible," I explained. I had reached the door when she called me back.

"Oh, I forgot to ask you what conspiracy you and the President were hatching. I saw you with your heads together the other night after the dinner, and meant to ask you before."

"That's one reason I'm going to the Legation now," I answered. "I'll tell you all about it later."

On my return she was feeling much happier.

"Well now," I began, "this is what I have in mind. The other night when the President and I were talking together, the conversation turned on volcanoes, and I remarked how we had noticed that in the Republics of Guatemala and San Salvador they were in a state of activity. He agreed, and told me he had observed the same conditions here, emphasizing that at the present moment a chain of four volcanoes was in a state of eruption,

and then he added something which interested me very much. 'The way the country is being devastated,' he declared, 'for hundreds of miles by the crater of Santiago, is appalling. I'm sure you have never seen anything like it. I haven't been there, but I am told it is a dreadful region. Strangely enough,' he continued, 'this visitation is not an ordinary eruption—there are no explosions, no lava flow. It appears to be a frightful volume of poisonous gas pouring up continually, and destroying the coffee plantations and entire agricultural district for miles. It's like a blight; it seems that everything—trees and bush and all vegetation—are just skeletons without a leaf on them.' Now you know how impulsive he is; what do you think he suddenly said to me?" I asked her.

"I bet I can guess," she replied. "He suggested we should go there and see it."

"You're right in one way and wrong in another. He certainly never said anything about 'us.' But he did propose that I should go. I mentioned that it was a certainty that if I went you'd want to come."

"What did he say to that?" she asked quickly.

"Well, you won't like it, but he definitely negatived the idea, and said it was impossible for you to attempt the journey. It apparently entails travelling to the end of the road leading from here into the bush, and after that many hours of mule-back over wicked country, and the crossing of two old lava flows—you know what that means," I added.

"Oh yes, I know," she answered. "Nevertheless I'm going." She was emphatic, and from experience, knowing argument was useless, I reluctantly gave in.

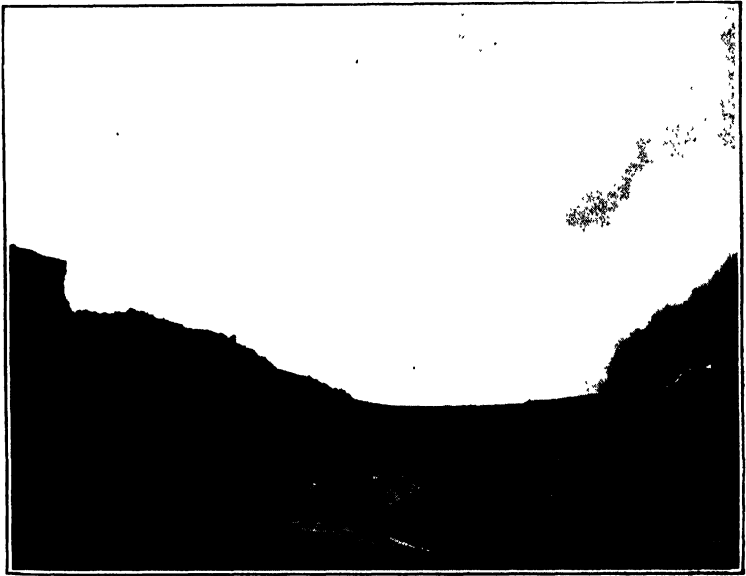
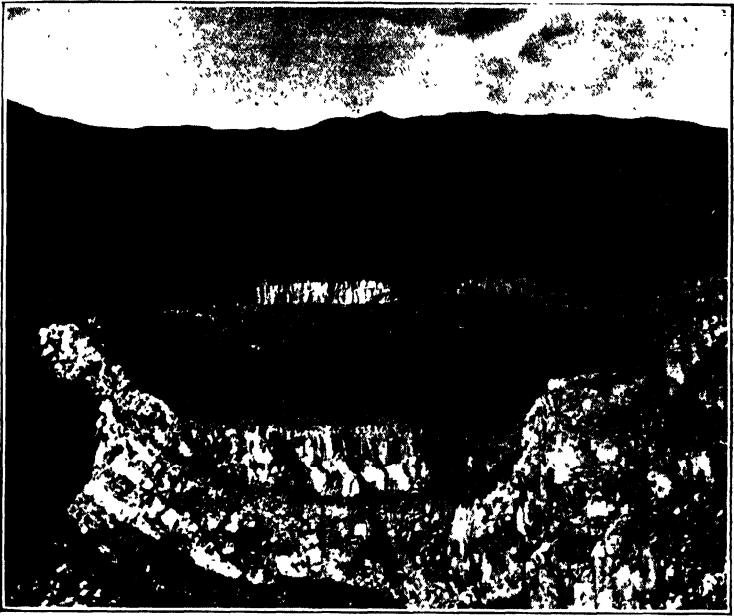
"Then I'd better drive to the Presidencia right away and tell His Excellency of our decision."

On arriving at the palace I informed him in a few words that we were ready to undertake the journey. He was very dubious about Lady Brown going, but in the end

he said he would see that all arrangements were made immediately.

Two days later all was ready, but it was fated that Lady Brown should not go. What had at first been a slight touch of malaria developed into quite a severe attack; but when, seeing how disappointed she was, I suggested I should postpone the expedition, she flatly refused to listen, and concluded by remarking, "You said you would go—now go."

Cars were placed at my disposal, and together with certain Government officials I drove out to where the road ended at a large plantation. Here attendants with mules and horses were waiting, and for the first time I obtained a view of the eruption. All that could be seen was a gigantic plume of smoke which completely covered jungle and bush as far as the eye could reach. Mounting, we rode for hours along a track in blazing heat; in parts the jungle was so dense that it arched across the trail, and ropes of liana and thorn-sprinkled vines which hung down made riding difficult, and to the unwary, painful. Ultimately we reached a steep ascent, and having climbed to the top, were able to see the ravages wrought. On the other side of this we emerged into a region of utter desolation; the greatest care had to be taken in travelling across ancient lava flows, as the jagged masses and breaks in the flow made progress hazardous and arduous. The heat was sweltering, but there were no mosquitoes or other insects, and after a few more miles we attained our goal in the early afternoon. The sun was obscured and photographs were impossible, but the sight was most impressive. After resting an hour, our escort suggested we should start on the return journey, but this was not my idea at all. I had definitely come to investigate and take photographs, and to return without doing either was not to be thought of. So as I was determined, a Colonel Rosalez, one of the most fearless men I have ever met, elected to remain with



I. THE LAKE OF ASHES.

2. APPROACHING THE CRATER

me, and we stayed, the rest of my escort returning to Managua.

Although holding colonel's rank, Señor Rosalez was quite young—I don't think he was yet thirty years of age, and he certainly had the spirit of adventure.

"Well, my boy," I said, "you're in for it now. What are we going to do? There's an hour or two yet before dark—I suggest we climb one of the hills and have a look round."

With great labour we sweated and toiled to the top of a small mountain to the north, and from the summit looked out over the surrounding country. It at once became apparent that the monster belching and vomiting forth clouds of smoke at our feet was actually situated within an immense crater which covered many miles. We found that to the south the smoke poured up from the yawning pit of Santiago, while to the north the hill on which we stood ended abruptly and fell sheer for a thousand feet or more—another crater which centuries ago had been active. An area of many square miles is known as the Crater of Masaya, and from this height we could see no less than seven other inactive craters within the one; five great lava flows, now black and cold, and a huge barren valley with perpendicular cliffs hundreds of feet high, burnt, blasted, and rent in every direction.

The light began to wane, and we made our way hurriedly down the side of the hill and decided to spend the night on the edge of the Crater of Santiago.

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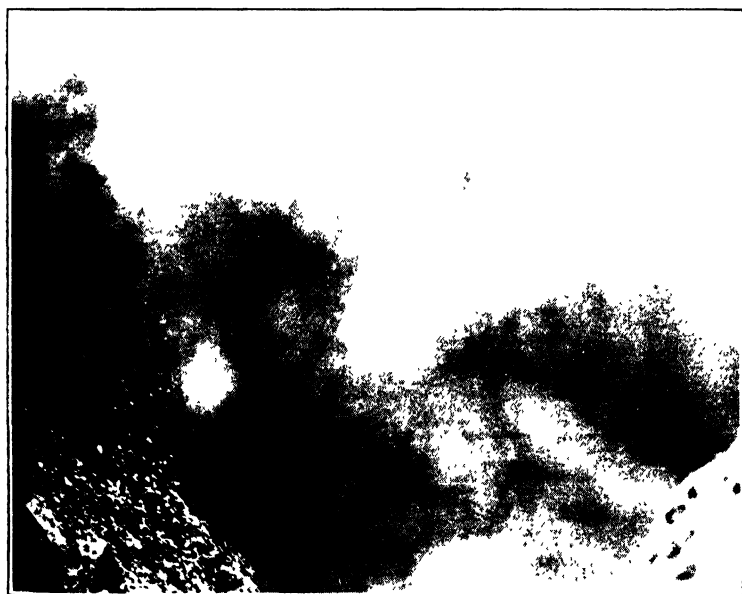
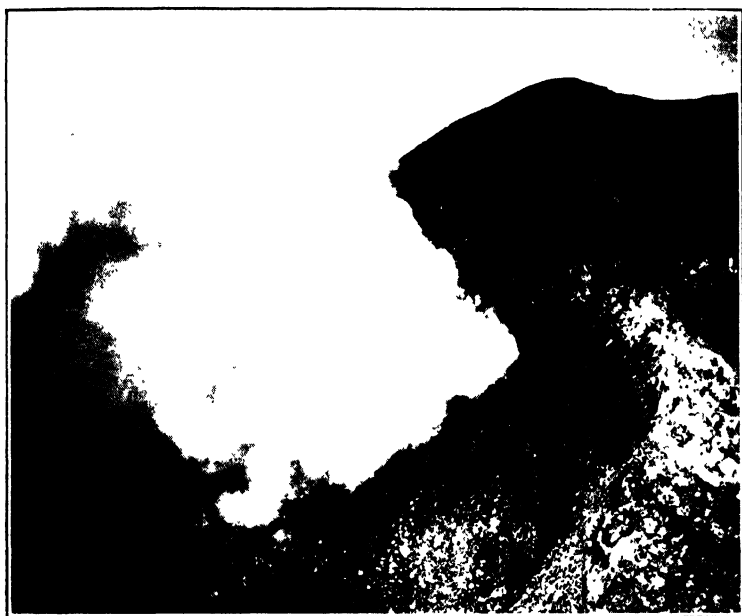
Now began a terrible night—a night I shall never forget. During the day the heat had been intense, but, at first slowly and then more rapidly, this changed to extreme cold. Lying full-length we peered, fascinated, over the edge into the depths below, and watched a sight which is ineffacably stamped on my mind for ever.

The great crater dropped perpendicularly for fifteen hundred feet. Only gigantic volumes of smoke were visible by day, but at night it was an inferno. The whole of this dreadful place—the sheer cliffs, even the great boulders which jutted out from the rocky strata—were illuminated by fire. We could see to the extreme bottom, where waves of flame streamed up two hundred and fifty feet towards the sky, lighting the columns of smoke to an immense height. Realizing the overwhelming forces of nature lying under the surface of the earth directly beneath us, we shuddered. Spell-bound, we lay there for hours; we wanted to leave, but something mesmeric, irresistible, impelled us to remain.

Within the crater a raging whirlwind was continuous; even where we lay the ground shivered incessantly. Several times masses of rock broke from the sides of the crater and boomed away below, and the echoes flung back from the walls added to the roaring which circled the yawning mouth of this nerve-shattering Hades.

The air grew colder until at last it was frigid. Finally, at about two o'clock in the morning, in a numbed condition, we tore ourselves away. It was only then I seemed able to think clearly, and could analyse the reason for the abnormally low temperature. The burning gases and the super-heated air from the subterranean fires shoot up with immense velocity for thousands of feet; a corresponding amount of air which is icy cold is sucked down from a great height, and envelops the bare ground around.

The hours of darkness, which seemed interminable, passed at last and morning broke on two of the most wretched human beings it is possible to imagine. Fortunately the sun rose in a cloudless sky, and never was warmth more welcome. During the night we had both experienced a sinister influence—a morbid depression, a distaste for, and longing to escape from, the world—almost a loathing of life. The crater, although repellent,



CLOSE UP TO THE INFERNO OF THE CRATER

lured. There came over me an awful desire to drop over the edge into the seething furnace below—into the warmth, the heat. No doubt the immensity of our dreadful surroundings, coupled with our half-frozen condition, had induced this unhealthy state of mind.

But as the sun rose higher this rolled from us like the mists in the valleys, and after sandwiches and a pull at the brandy-flask we began to climb a hill immediately behind us to the south. On reaching the top the sight that met our eyes made us pause in amazement before starting to clamber down, holding on to jagged boulders and slithering over hard-baked earth. The last half of our descent was accomplished by sliding on our backs down a steep bank of fine cinder-sand, and in this way, enveloped and completely grey with dust, we gained the valley—a valley I find it almost impossible to describe. No stretch of the imagination could conjure up a more ghastly place; no pictures portraying hell could have ever surpassed the reality of this indescribable Hades.

Having slid to the bottom of the ash-bank, we found ourselves in an immense valley entirely composed of burnt reddish rocks and lava, riven and shattered in every direction. We proceeded along this until it suddenly broke off as if the earth had opened, and before us stretched a chasm. The bottom was a lake of fine blackish-grey sand and ashes, absolutely flat and over a thousand yards wide. On the opposite side hills of red lava rose sheer again, and towering high above were more lava cliffs. (On a gigantic scale these reminded me somewhat of the Palisades of New Jersey rising from the Hudson River near New York City, or a smaller though similar formation which can be seen on the side of Arthur's Seat which overlooks Edinburgh, and which was probably in the remote past a volcano.) The smoke pouring out from the crater obscured the sun and cast a deep shadow over a conical blackened mountain which rose in the background,

and added to the malevolence of this lifeless spot. We determined to follow the valley as far as possible.

Shortly, the lava became intersected by lanes of grey-black sand and ashes, which looked like small streams flowing over the reddened earth. We stepped down gingerly to cross the first one. Thank God we were cautious; for as we moved forward, what appeared to be solid ground gave way beneath our feet and disappeared into unfathomable depths with a dull booming sound. We had been on the brink of death. Had we not involuntarily leapt back just in time—well, it is not pleasant to contemplate. We peered down into the ~~chasm~~ and hurled large fragments of lava into the abyss, only to hear again that same dull boom, trailing off into a faint whisper as the rocks ricocheted from side to side—then silence. We were standing on a crust beneath which there was nothing—there was no bottom. Making a detour we continued our journey.

“For God’s sake,” I said to Rosalez, “test every foot of the way in front of you.” A rather banal remark, as I could see he needed no such warning. One experience was enough.

Soon afterwards we came upon numerous other fissures, and although we threw masses of lava down each they apparently dropped into a bottomless pit. We stumbled on until we entered a lake of ashes where the ground fell away into a circular chasm three-quarters of a mile to a mile in width. We lay flat, and each in turn by holding the other’s legs, peered over. Although the outline of the precipitous walls was visible some thousands of feet down, again there was no bottom; the sense of immensity was overwhelming. Beyond question this was another extinct crater.

We then decided to continue along the valley to the very mouth of the crater of Santiago. The photographs will almost tell the story, although perhaps it may be wondered



PEERING TO DEPTHS 1,500 FT. BELOW. A FEARFUL MOMENT

how one was able to obtain a close-up picture of the actual smoke rushing up from the interior. This was done by creeping to the edge and kneeling on a jutting piece of lava, holding the camera lens downwards. While in this position I experienced a fear so dreadful that the sweat poured from me, and when finally I crept away I could scarcely stand. As I knelt on the lava boulder, the fumes enveloping me so that I choked and my eyes streamed with water, suddenly the earth rocked, the hills and valley quivered, the lava on which I was kneeling trembled—I felt my body shake. In those few seconds I mentally experienced the unspeakable horror of the boulder breaking away, and my body somersaulting down—down—into the boiling sulphur. I admit I sweated with fear.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE TROUBLE BREAKS—AN ARMED DINNER-PARTY

WHEN Colonel Rosalez and I started on our return journey from the crater of Santiago, it was with a feeling of relief, and on my part heartfelt thankfulness that I was still alive. Death in a most dreadful form had come very close to us, and I shuddered at the thought as we rode down the trail towards Managua. Yet I would not have missed the last twenty-four hours for the world. It was one of those experiences that stand out, a milestone in one's life; and stranger still, the fascination, the lure of that inferno with its elemental fires and mephitic volumes of gaseous smoke pouring up, remains with me to this day. Even now I feel an urge to stand once more on the edge of that Stygian pit; I could imagine a Cagliostro or a Dr. Dee making it a foul stronghold for the practice of the black arts.

Arriving in the capital, I found Lady Brown practically her old self again; her attack of malaria had subsided. She was all excitement to know the results of our expedition, and as I described it I could see she was terribly disappointed at not having been with us.

"Did you get any photographs?" she enquired eagerly.

"Rather!" I answered. "And, thanks to Colonel Rosalez, some (if they come out all right) of myself on the edge of the crater. But you'll be able to see for yourself. It was the luckiest thing in the world that he stayed with me; he certainly has nerve, and, what was equally important here, a knowledge of the camera."

"But tell me," she persisted; "what were your real impressions?"

" I can only answer in this way. You know I have stood at the side of Niagara, and spent hours watching the water thunder through the gorge there. You and I have seen rivers in flood covering the country for miles and sweeping all before them. Do you remember the night of the electrical storm when all the world rocked, and our yacht was struck by lightning, and how the mast and covering of the deck were torn completely away, leaving nothing but fused iron stanchions? We've lived among Indian tribes, penetrated jungles and seen much. But I have never experienced anything so impressive, never been brought face to face with such overwhelming forces, and never known the meaning of such awful fear as there on the edge of that crater. Have you ever pictured the den of a maleficent sorcerer poring over the Book of Thoth, and casting his corrupt blight over the world? That's exactly how the volcano of Santiago appealed to me." I paused for a moment as the vividness of the scene recurred. " Now I'm going straight to see the President. I promised to give him a full report as soon as ever I got back. I shan't be long."

Arriving at the palace I was shown immediately to the study, and had scarcely shaken hands with His Excellency before he bombarded me with questions which I did my best to answer.

" As far as I can discover," I said, " over fifteen hundred feet below the mouth of the crater there is possibly one of the greatest liberations of hot sulphur gas in the world. It is absolutely pure, without steam or any other gases. The pure sulphur gas ignites on meeting the air; it requires a volume of air forty times greater than the gas to cause ignition. Afterwards, one part of the burnt gas oxydises and forms trioxide, and this creates the gigantic plumes of dense smoke that obscure the sun and spread for hundreds of miles. The entire country over an enormous area is blasted and all vegetation destroyed. There's no sign of

life—it is a place of desolation; the jungle and bush are nothing but leafless trees stripped and withered. I should think it's the sulphurous gas that is responsible for this. Day and night there is a continuous roaring, and huge boulders, dislodged by earth tremors, falling from the sides within the crater, cause an intermittent booming like subterranean explosions."

"What a catastrophe to have such a dreadful place in one's country," the President remarked.

"Yes—and no," I replied. "I can't help thinking that if it were possible to continue the road on from where it now ends up to the crater it might become a marvellous attraction for tourists, and they would have a thrill that they couldn't get anywhere else."

He was silent for a few minutes, then suddenly slapped me on the shoulder.

"I believe you're right," he said. "I shall seriously consider that." And added, apparently as an after-thought, "If I am in a position to do so. By the way," he continued irrelevantly, "when do you think of leaving?"

"Well, we thought of spending perhaps another month here. You have been so awfully kind and helpful, and the people are so charming that we are loath to go."

He looked directly at me.

"I don't want you to misunderstand me in any way; it has been a great pleasure for me to meet Lady Brown and yourself, but I think if you leave within the next few days it will be better."

For a moment I was startled, wondering if in any way we had transgressed the laws of the country, or perhaps outstayed our welcome. Then in a flash the inner meaning of his words came to me, and impulsively I held out my hand.

"General, if you want me to, I'll stay right here, and any help I can give you have only to command."

He shook his head.

"It wouldn't do, my friend, for you to be mixed up in the politics of this country, though I appreciate your offer more than you can know."

On my return, Lady Brown remarked on my seriousness.

"What's the matter?" she enquired.

"There's no doubt," I answered, "the country is on the verge of a revolution. The President has practically told me so—in fact he intimated we had better leave within a few days—which means as soon as we can. It's an awful pity, especially as already I had in mind an expedition into the interior. But of course as things are it's out of the question."

"I suppose there's nothing else to do," she said regretfully. "But I hate going. I feel I want to stay right here and help—there must be something I could do."

"There is," I rejoined. "Help me to arrange a dinner to the President, his wife, and others. We'd better make it the day after to-morrow; it's short notice, but I'm sure the President will understand."

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure," she said. "How and where?"

"I've got a scheme," I replied. "I'm going to see if I can borrow the British Legation."

"Don't be so ridiculous."

"I'm perfectly serious; and what's more, I'm off now to see Patteson and try to fix it up. Further, we'll invite Mr. Dennis, the American Minister."

"That's foolishness," she remarked. "In the first place your idea about the Legation is absurd, and secondly Mr. Dennis couldn't come. You know as well as I do that the United States Government has refused to recognize General Chamorro. How could their Minister attend a dinner given for him?"

"There's no reason in the world why he shouldn't. It's purely friendly—not an official affair."

"Well, there's nothing like trying, but I'm afraid you're going to be disappointed."

There was no object in delaying, so I immediately left for the British Legation; and far from throwing cold water on my scheme, Mr. Patteson, the British Chargé d'Affaires, was quite enthusiastic. He was a good sportsman, and when I explained my idea to him about getting the American Minister to come to the dinner, he offered to ring him up himself, and did so at once.

"He'll come," he said, after a conversation over the telephone.

"Right-ho. Then I'm going straight back to have the invitation sent to the President." And very shortly I burst in upon Lady Brown with the news. "All fixed, you pessimist!" I shouted. "Now you must write to His Excellency, and we will deliver it straight away."

Suffice it to say that the President accepted our invitation, though unhappily it transpired subsequently that his wife could not attend.

On the day fixed for the dinner I had slept late, and was aroused by calls, shouts, and running feet in the street outside. On dressing hurriedly and dashing out, I saw a man I knew well, one of the leading merchants in the town, talking to two or three other people who all seemed greatly agitated. My friend had evidently dressed in haste: all he had on was a shirt and trousers. I joined them.

"What's all the excitement?"

"Oh my God, it's terrible," my merchant friend replied. "The revolution has come; they have torn and blown up the line for nearly a quarter of a mile between here and Corinto."

"Are you certain?" I asked.

"Positive. I've just had a telephone message," one of the other men broke in, "from Leon. My son-in-law lives there. He had only time to tell me of the outbreak

and the blowing up of the railroad when the line went dead. The wires must have been cut while he was speaking."

I returned to the hotel. Lady Brown had also been awakened by the noise in the street, and was anxiously awaiting me, having guessed I had gone out to reconnoitre.

We had planned to leave the next day.

"We shan't go to-morrow," I said. "Not a chance. Here we are and here we're likely to stay. The revolution has broken out, and the rebels have torn and blown up the railroad for a quarter of a mile."

"I'm not surprised—I fully expected it," she replied philosophically. Then her thoughts were diverted into another channel. "What on earth are we going to do about money? Here we are—stranded, and it's quite likely we shan't be able to get any."

"That's the least of our troubles," I answered. "Let's get something to eat, then I'll try to find out the real facts."

Later the city became filled with the most alarming reports. The position was obviously serious, as could be seen by the soldiers continually passing through the streets. A number of men whom we had met socially had doffed their civilian clothes for uniform. During the afternoon Lady Brown remarked suddenly:

"Our dinner to-night looks like being spoilt. I doubt if the President will be able to come."

"You needn't bother your head about that," I answered. "He said he was coming, and he will be there."

I went out a little later, to discover that the city was alarmed by rumours that if His Excellency left the palace to attend our dinner he would be assassinated. How or where these reports originated nobody seemed to know, but they were taken very seriously. Yet in spite of this I still retained my belief that the President would be at the Legation that night.

At about seven o'clock we left the hotel. The dinner was at seven-thirty, but we were anxious to get there half an hour before His Excellency, to see that all preparations were complete. We were amazed to find the avenue from the palace to the doors of the Legation, a distance of half a mile, lined with the National Guard fully armed with rifles and fixed bayonets, and all traffic had been stopped. We had not proceeded more than a hundred yards before we were held up, but upon being recognized we were allowed to pass; and after several more challenges we reached our destination.

When Mr. Dennis arrived I took him into the dining-hall where the decorations amused him greatly. The room was draped with the flags of Nicaragua, Great Britain, and America in a trinity of friendship, while the same national emblems in miniature adorned the table.

"Can you beat it!" the Minister laughed. "Here are a President and Government not recognized by Washington, here is the American flag draped in alliance with that of a country whose President we have officially demanded should resign, and here am I—the United States Minister!"

"And they say," I murmured, "that the English have no sense of humour."

Our little joke was interrupted by hoarse shouts of command from without. The doors of the Legation were opened—punctually to the minute the President had arrived.

As we went forward to greet him the hall became packed with officers and soldiers all fully armed, headed by Major Carter (another American in command of the national guard in Managua). As we walked through to the room where cocktails were to be served, His Excellency apologized to us for his wife's absence which, in the circumstances, was easily understood. He then unexpectedly patted my hip and laughed. There was certainly a suspicious swelling beneath my dinner-jacket; but although

believing firmly in preparedness, I had hoped the gun strapped there would not be noticed.

We quickly learned that the President had received full warning of the plot afoot to assassinate him, but he simply ignored it. He was much amused when, on entering the dining-room, he noticed the decorations.

We sat down to surely one of the strangest dinners that have ever been attended by the President of a country. It was an armed dinner-party. During the meal at least twenty soldiers with rifles and fixed bayonets stood within a few feet of the table, while several officers were stationed at the doorway, their loaded guns in their belts. But these war-like precautions in no way detracted from the jollity. We had a great evening; the President was in splendid form, and appeared to enjoy himself thoroughly.

Somewhat early—about eleven o'clock—he rose. We knew his mantle of gaiety must be lined with worry. As he left, Lady Brown and I walked with him to his car; two automobiles drove up immediately behind it, packed with armed men. Officers shouted orders, a guard of soldiers closed round in a solid body, and as he drove away we stood for some minutes listening. On returning to the Legation, and as the doors closed, I felt a great relief—there had been no shots.

“A great little man,” I said to Mr. Dennis. “Unless I am very wrong, your country is making a big mistake in not recognizing him. There’s going to be hell let loose in this Republic.”

“He’s a strong man all right,” the American Minister answered reflectively.

The rest of our conversation, in which Mr. Patteson joined, was very confidential.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE HORRORS OF CIVIL WAR

WAR! Within a few short hours a country, an Eden of plenty, was transported from peace and contentment into all the ghastly horrors of civil strife. Early on the morning after the dinner reports percolated through that the train from the north had been dynamited and the line cut. This was followed by further bad news; all telegraphic and other communication in the outlying districts had been destroyed, and Managua, the capital, was isolated. Here in the city all telephone and telegraph lines were immediately commandeered and taken over by the Government, and wholesale conscription was enforced. Men and boys walking along the streets were rounded up without being given time to go to their homes to say *Adios*, while men of all ages were taken from stores, business offices, and *cantinas* and rushed to camp.

I was with the President during the morning, and we discussed the situation. His Excellency and the highest-placed Government officials gave me their complete confidence, and I became convinced that the revolution, which, it appeared, must inevitably convulse the country, would never have taken place but for the misguided and ill-advised action of the United States. In refusing to support General Emiliano Chamorro they had given a direct incentive to the opposing political parties. They were virtually saying "Drive him out; fight. You have our moral, possibly our active, support."

The temperament of a people cannot be changed, and the well-ordered canons and customs—God save me from

them!—of countries that are densely populated, are absurd when applied to places where the natural instinct and not an artificially acquired one still predominates. Well-meaning and paternal though official Washington may be, yet is it possible that the Governments of Central American Republics can believe in the sincerity of the American politicians when there are more outrages committed in one month in Chicago than in the whole of the Central American Republics in a year?

On this same day, and just before my interview with the President, another demand had been received from Washington for his resignation. This had the opposite effect to that which it was doubtless intended to produce.

"I am going to fight, M-H.," he said. "I refuse to have another country dictate to me and order me what I must do. I am not afraid of the 'big stick'."

On my return to the hotel I found Lady Brown naturally anxious for news, and I told her briefly what had happened.

"Do you think he'll resign?" she enquired.

"Not a chance," I replied. "He's a fighter to the backbone, and fight he will until the forces arrayed against him are so overwhelming that further resistance is impossible. I think you must reconcile yourself to the fact," I added, "there here we are and here we're likely to be for some time."

In spite of the innumerable worries with which the President was surrounded, with the palace besieged with callers and snowed under with preparations for the coming struggle, that afternoon his car arrived at the hotel with a delightful note for Lady Brown, to the effect that although, owing to the exigencies with which the Government was faced, all vehicles had had to be commandeered, yet he begged that she would use his own car, which would be at her disposal at all times; a charming act of gallantry, and typical of Emiliano Chamorro.

All day long disturbing rumours poured into the capital,

and every hour the position became more serious. Late that night Colonel Rosalez dropped in to see us, with the news that he was leaving immediately in command of four hundred men for Chinandega, where the fighting was already bitter.

"I think it will be worse than the volcano!" he laughed. "I expect we shall go into action right away—I hope so, anyhow," he added.

"You blood-thirsty devil," I retorted. "I believe you're Irish—always spoiling for a scrap!"

He could stay only a few minutes, and as we wished him all of the best he became serious.

"We have had a great time together," he said. "I wonder if we shall meet again?"

I patted him on the back.

"You silly ass, of course we shall."

We walked out with him; he saluted, went to the head of his men, and the column marched off.

"Damn the revolution. It's an outrage those men going off to fight for nothing. Doesn't it make you feel miserable, Mabs?" I asked.

"Miserable doesn't express it," she answered, and added viciously, "I call it criminal, especially as nobody seems to know what it's all about."

"Wish I could have gone along with him," I said rather enviously.

"I knew it. That's exactly what's the matter with you—you're simply hankering to get mixed up in this trouble."

"Nothing of the sort," I protested.

"Oh yes, you are. I know you; you hate to think you're out of it. But," she continued seriously, "don't be foolish—don't do anything rash."

"You're right; though it does seem a bit rotten to stop here and see a man whom you really like go off as young Rosalez has just done,"

All night long the streets echoed with shouts, vehicles lumbering past, and the never-ending tread of men; and we awoke next day to find that all food prices had risen fifty per cent. It looked as if the question of supplies might become a very serious one. That night we dined with the President, and although bad news was coming through on the telephone all the time, he was still his jovial self—the perfect host. On our way back to the hotel we saw large numbers of Indians marching up the street to their various head-quarters—poor devils, dragged from their little villages on the edge of the jungle.

But next day we witnessed one of the most heartbreaking sights I have ever seen. Hundreds of men began to march out of the city. Most of them were coloured, and every few minutes their wild piercing yells rang out. Walking with them were dozens of women, many of them carrying babies, and with children of all ages hanging on to them. Most of these poor souls were raving hysterically; tears were streaming down their cheeks, their hair was flying in disorder and their cries were unforgettable. Continually they implored the Almighty and Jesus to help them. The children, seeing the distress of their mothers, filled the air with wails and high-pitched, animal cries. The unemotionalism of the women was swept aside; the male animal was being torn from its mate, leaving her alone with her offspring.

I was drawn to the station to see the departure of the soldiers; they were going down the line to meet the rebels, and the scene here was indescribable. The trucks were packed tight with men. As the time for leaving neared, the hysteria of the women rose to frenzy; with their arms round the necks of their men they clung to them, while children hung on to their fathers' knees, and tiny babies unable to walk, discarded in the stress of the moment, lay about everywhere. A woman with two tiny children suddenly staggered back, jostled and crushed by the

seething mob. Slowly she collapsed to the ground where she lay plucking at her clothing until she succeeded in tearing off her rags. Practically naked she twisted and writhed while the mob kicked their feet against and stumbled over her. Her frightened little ones had crawled close to her, and she flung a protecting arm around them. Her lips parted in a fixed grin; her knees were slowly drawn up, and her body heaved convulsively. What I saw was enough. At that moment I caught sight of an officer, pushed my way through the crowd to his side, and peremptorily seized him by the arm. He turned on me sharply, but as he recognized me his manner changed.

"Come quickly," I said to him. "It's horrible. Here's a woman lying on the ground, kicked and trodden on by these maniacs, and—my God!—she's having a child."

We reached her, yet although but a few short minutes had elapsed we were almost too late; that she was in the throes of childbirth was dreadfully obvious. He at once gave orders, and together with several other men seized her by the arms and dragged her along the ground clear of the seething mass, while, grabbing the two children, I followed.

As the train was about to leave the scene was terrible; the shrieks of the women were piercing as the officers in command, with the assistance of others, tore them away. Some fell, others flung themselves to the ground violently sick, beating their heads and piteously imploring mercy. Not understanding, unable to read or write, with no warning, for no reason, their men were taken from them—sent out to be slaughtered. A revolution had broken out, of which they had no knowledge; and now their men were going to their deaths. Why—why? What crime had they committed?

Just before the train pulled out I had to leave; my stomach is pretty strong, but it was turned by this scene. I couldn't stand it any longer. Never shall I forget those

wailing, moaning women, frantic with the agony of parting; and as I walked up the street I wondered grimly for what purpose had a beneficent deity, a god of love, created these poor people that they should be made to suffer thus? The eternal cruelty of nature to humanity—the senselessness, the meaninglessness of the whole scheme! Yet—not senseless or meaningless to the unprincipled scoundrels who deliberately stir up revolt that they may pocket blood-money from the guns and ammunition they supply.

I had not reached the hotel when I ran into another large body of natives marching towards the station. Many of them were only boys about fourteen or fifteen years of age, and they had evidently come a considerable distance, as their women were not with them. They were an irresponsible, unruly rabble, shouting songs at the top of their voices, and every now and then firing their rifles indiscriminately. As probably none of them had ever held one before, the rifle was like a new toy. The officers in command were powerless to keep any sort of order. With the Latin temperament the discharge of fire-arms is always infectious, and that night revolvers and rifles in the hands of many who were drunk became a menace, and it was a risk to life to go out into the streets. Most of the stores had hurriedly closed early in the day, and practically every man one met was fully armed.

About ten o'clock that night the wildest excitement broke over the city. Maroons and rockets were fired, all the church bells rang, and the rumour spread that the war was over and the President victorious. The streets became packed with people cheering and shouting themselves hoarse with joy.

"Do you think it's true?" Lady Brown enquired.

"Of course it isn't," I answered. "There's been fighting somewhere, and the Government troops have won. We shall hear all about it in the morning."

Next day, however, it developed that a serious blow

had been struck at the rebels when, near Chinandega, they had been heavily defeated, with many killed and a number taken prisoners. And, still more important, the Government was again in full control of the railroad line to the coast. Without waiting I at once called on the President to congratulate him.

"It's quite true," he said. "We now hold the line, and it has been repaired. It gives you a chance to get to Corinto."

"But dash it, we can't do that," I exclaimed.

"You must," he replied. "And——" Here he gave me a piece of information which decided me. He knew he could not win; the forces against him were too great, and although he would fight to the last, the end was inevitable. And still he smiled.

I returned to the hotel and fetched Lady Brown back to the palace to make our adieux. Even in the short time since I left him, the President had given instructions for a special coach to be attached to the train, and had made other arrangements of which at that time we had no knowledge. Within an hour we had packed and were at the station, to find everything awaiting us. We were surprised to see in front of the engine an armoured car packed with soldiers; on the cab of the engine, on the tender, and in our own saloon were at least fifty armed guards. Behind were several empty carriages.

Amidst a scene of great commotion we left Managua, men and women dashing forward at the last minute and leaping into the carriages behind. I shrewdly suspected the men of fleeing from conscription; the women had possibly an insane idea of joining their men in the camps.

The greatest excitement prevailed throughout the journey. We pulled up at all bridges, and soldiers descended and walked over them testing every foot of the way before the train crossed. On arriving at Leon we found the town in an uproar; people were half crazy in

their anxiety to get away, and they stormed the train so that had we not been well guarded our private coach would have been crowded out. As we pulled out of the station, so thick were the people on the line, fighting among themselves to clutch and hang on anywhere, that it seemed certain many would be ground beneath the wheels of the engine. But as far as I could see there were no accidents.

At Chinandega many people were fleeing for their lives, laden with as many of their household goods as they could carry. Near here was the spot where the track had been blown and torn up and a bridge destroyed, while a sugar factory had been razed almost to the ground. There is no doubt looting was in full swing; this we could see by the articles many of the natives were carrying.

But comedy lurked in the midst of tragedy. An officer boarded the train at a little village, and anxiously enquired if we had any surplus ammunition. We immediately came to the conclusion that there must have been serious fighting, and the troops had fired their last cartridge. But nothing like this had occurred; the Federals had simply forgotten that essential—ammunition. Guns, yes; but no ammunition.

"If the rebels only knew," I said to Lady Brown, "the place would be a shambles. They would march on that village and butcher the lot of them."

After many hours we arrived at Corinto. We had learned one thing; that this was no pantomime revolution. Nicaragua was in for a long war; passions had been roused to boiling-point, and death is always very close in Central America when this stage is reached.

We were glad to meet Major Clay again and many of his friends at our hotel, which had been commandeered as their head-quarters; and during the evening we were to hear, among other tragedies, of one that immediately concerned us. Our friend Colonel Rosalez, on arriving at Chinandega with his troops, had made his head-quarters at

the house of his uncle, who lived there. But the sympathy of his relative was not with the President. On the evening of Rosalez' arrival a quarrel had broken out, during which his uncle bitterly reproached the young man for being on the side of the Government and in command of a body of troops. Uncle and nephew on opposite sides, bitterly opposed; words changed to recriminations, then flamed into threats, and suddenly Rosalez, completely losing control of himself, had pulled his gun and put five bullets through his uncle.

War could be responsible for much; normally our friend would never have been guilty of such an act as this. He had always been on the best of terms with his uncle, and in fact had been talking to me about him only a few days before and said he hoped I should meet him while I was in Nicaragua. Yet in a moment of unrestrained passion he had committed a deed which, knowing him as I do, I am sure he would regret all the days of his life.

CHAPTER XXXIV

WE ESCAPE—ADIOS, NICARAGUA—REMINISCENCES OF TABOGA

ON making enquiries, we discovered that the boats were giving Corinto a wide berth; there were orders that every ship arriving would be searched, and would be most stringently required to give exact particulars not only in regard to what freight she was landing but also concerning all passengers on board. The position in the port was certainly not happy; chiefly through jealousy a breach was gradually widening between the National Guard and the Federal troops, and it appeared almost certain that at any moment trouble would break out. The second night after our arrival was very disturbing. Just as we were going to turn in we heard firing in the distance, and that was followed by the calling out of the National Guard.

"I hope to heaven there's not going to be an attack on the town," Lady Brown remarked.

"Anything's possible," I assured her oracularly. "Nothing will surprise me; but I'd rather the rebels attacked than the soldiers and the National Guard should start fighting one another. In that case there'd be Old Harry to pay; this hotel would be burnt to the ground in no time, and the town, too, once they really got out of hand." I don't know what I was going to add; whatever it might have been was interrupted by continuous though irregular firing much nearer to us. We listened intently.

"It doesn't sound like fighting," I said. "Though what the devil it can be I don't know." Our speculations were shortly set at rest; it was a reinforcement of Federal troops

arriving, drunk to the world, and blazing at any and every thing. We decided that Corinto was not a nice place to live in during a revolution.

There was still no sign of a boat calling at the port next day; but our anxiety was broken by an amusing incident. The orders were rigid that every ship entering here was to be searched, irrespective of tonnage or nationality. We had walked down to the front, and were watching a little dug-out paddling across the bay, when about a hundred soldiers marched down and took up a position on the sea-front, obviously awaiting the arrival of this frail craft. The bow had scarcely touched the beach when the two natives were seized and a thorough examination was made of the little canoe, which was filled with the most innocent of cargoes, fruit and vegetables. But I fear that by the time the search was concluded only skins remained of the bananas, while the remainder of the produce had miraculously disappeared. So thankful were the wretched natives to get off with their lives that not a word of protest did they utter, poor beggars. We felt awfully sorry for them, and when Lady Brown gave them a peso each they almost fell at her feet with gratitude. There is no doubt they were left stranded and destitute by the looting of the provisions which they had brought in the misguided belief that owing to the shortage of food in the town they would be able to get a good price for them.

Returning to the hotel we found a very serious Major Clay looking for us.

"I've just heard," he said, "that a big body of the rebels, heavily reinforced from the Chinandega district, is marching on Corinto, and two ship-loads of ammunition have been landed via the Gulf of Fonseca."

"Who is supplying all their ammunition?" I enquired.

"That's the mystery," he answered. "We can't find out anyhow. But it's definite that arms are continually arriving."

"Nice prospect, isn't it," I exclaimed, "bottled up here!" I took him on one side. "How serious is the position?" I asked.

"Damned serious. My forces are all right, but the Federal troops are not to be trusted. I am very much afraid that on the approach of the rebels they will desert and go over to them."

"Good God!" I ejaculated. "I hope to heaven you're wrong!"

"I hope I am," he rejoined. "But I think it's only too likely, and you can imagine what would happen if they started to loot the *cantinas*."

"I don't want to picture it to myself," I replied; "and I wish Lady Brown wasn't here."

"That's just what I am thinking," he answered.

I must admit I was worried stiff; and then the unexpected happened. I was arguing with Lady Brown as to the best thing for her to do when a man came hotfoot to tell us a boat was coming in, and was even then close to the dock but would be there only a very short time. Major Clay at once gave orders to his men to carry our baggage down, and within a matter of minutes we were across the wharf and on the boat, whose destination, fortunately, was Panama. Nothing could have been more opportune. It was sheer luck. Had we not been able to leave Managua when we did we should doubtless have been boxed up there indefinitely; for the revolution continued intermittently, with various fresh leaders arising, for more than two years. It became so serious that in the end the United States had to despatch warships, land marines, and finally send a squadron of bombing planes. But the mountains, jungles, and swamps of Nicaragua lend themselves to guerilla warfare, as Washington discovered to its cost. More promising young lives sacrificed, more money wasted, more bitter feelings aroused; when with wise diplomacy and a little human understanding the revolution

in Nicaragua might yet have been, if not entirely avoided, at least localized to an insignificant political affair. And incidentally the elusive Sandino, the bandit rebel general, was never captured after all. He is a terrible scoundrel, but I can't help admiring his audacity.

We were seated on deck next morning, filled with self-satisfaction at the great good luck which had enabled us to get away from the Republic, when for some reason the gruesome spectacle of a few days before, when the native troops were leaving Managua, recurred to me; the seething mob of frantic women and the wretched girl collapsing on the ground in childbirth—the hideousness of it sent a cold shiver through me.

"You're very quiet," Lady Brown remarked.

"I was just thinking," I answered, "of that terrible scene I told you about at the railroad station. My God, I've never seen anything more awful. It made my blood boil. People who believe in war and agree with it are to my mind mental degenerates, and those directly responsible are Neros, grasping for power and not caring what destruction they cause, what suffering they inflict or whom they destroy; sadistic egotists insane with the lust of rapacity. Shall I tell you what I honestly believe?" I continued. "When the heads of a Government provoke war—I don't care whether it's king, president, or ministers—then the people, instead of acting like a herd of cattle and allowing themselves to become cannon fodder, should rise *en masse*, turn on them, drag them out and shoot them. Or put them into an arena and say, 'You want to fight? All right—go to it. Kill one another. We will reverse the order and watch your gladiatorial combat.' There would be no need for disarmaments then, or Peace Conferences; and there would certainly be no more wars."

Carried away by my feelings, I should probably have expressed myself further, so it was perhaps as well that at that moment Lady Brown's attention was suddenly

diverted and she jumped up with a start. We looked down, and there saw the most miserable-looking little parrot I have ever set eyes on. One of Lady Brown's legs had evidently appealed to him as a delightfully easy tree to climb, and his sharp claws and beak pricking her had caused her to jump. As he walked along the deck in the clumsy, pigeon-toed way of all parrots, he cocked his funny head on one side in such a pathetic fashion that she immediately fell in love with him. He was the tamest little fellow imaginable; and when she picked him up and stroked him he appeared quite contented, as if at last he had found a home of refuge.

"I wonder who ever has cut his wings and tail?" she said to me. "Just look at them." And they had indeed been ruthlessly hacked.

"I suppose he must belong to someone on board," she continued. At that moment we saw a young girl apparently searching for something, so I enquired whether the parrot belonged to her, and discovered that he did. But our feathered friend showed every indication of unwillingness to return to his mistress, and the girl insisted that Lady Brown should keep him. From that day to this he has lived in the lap of luxury, which he certainly would not be doing had he not transferred his allegiance.

It is strange what curious people one meets on these coast-boats. The girl in question, who had scarcely any clothes or money, followed the most ancient of professions, although she could not have been more than seventeen. She confided to me later that as trade was very bad in San Salvador, where her home was, greatly daring she had determined to come to Panama, where friends of hers had informed her there were many more opportunities. Without the slightest embarrassment she enquired of me whether I could find her a home and a nice man to live with when she arrived on the isthmus. She was an entertaining creature, and although she was so young one

could have written a book on her experiences and the things she had seen; it would have made a very pathetic human document. I often thought afterwards when I looked at the parrot and saw the care that was taken of him that he was luckier than his erstwhile mistress. She, poor girl, died under distressing and terrible circumstances within two months of her arrival in Panama.

The waters of the Pacific on the west coast of Central America teem with fish, and we spent hours watching the shoals of porpoise and dolphins as they broke water and leapt into the air glistening in the sun. Frequently a lazy old turtle would wait until the boat was almost on her before diving.

Some miles off the coast of Costa Rica is the famous Cocos Island, the Mecca to which for years confidence tricksters have lured their victims with tales of the mythical buried treasure. I am told the whole island has been blasted with dynamite and dug up in the search for pieces of eight.

A morning or two later we sighted the lovely islands of Taboga and Taboguilla off our port bow. We were in the Bay of Panama, and within an hour or so should land in that most delightful of Republics. It was one of those mornings that can be seen only in the tropics; cobalt velvet sea without a ripple, heaving to a gentle, lazy swell. All around us irregular dark patches showed on the mirror-surface—schools of fish on which frigate birds and boobies were swooping down and taking heavy toll. Every now and again thousands of fry would leap from the water, flashing like a beautifully jewelled silver curtain.

As we stood by the ship's rail, the calm water was suddenly broken by a triangular dorsal fin. Lazily it cut the surface, slowed down, then at incredible speed the eighteen-foot shark dashed at one of the dark patches. The water boiled as in every direction small fish leapt and raced for their lives from the relentless enemy.

"By Jove, that was a big one!" I exclaimed. "The same old place, Mabs—it hasn't changed. What a wonderful year that was that we spent here, day after day battling with the giant fish. Do you remember that devil of a fight we had with the hammerhead shark that measured seventeen and a half feet, and that voracious brute with its curved teeth, the tiger-shark? I forget how big that was."

"I don't," she replied eagerly. "It was twenty feet nine inches, and it came within an ace of spelling disaster for us. I can see its frightful tail even now as it lashed round. And as if it were yesterday I can remember how frightened I was when you and the two natives were being towed out to sea in the dinghy by that horrible saw-fish——"

"Oh baby, that was a fish!" I interrupted her. "And what a struggle we had! Five hours it took us to land it. I remember the length of that one, and the weight. It was thirty-one feet long, and weighed five thousand seven hundred pounds." ¹

It was the island of Taboga, now within a mile of us, that we had made our head-quarters. No wonder memories crowded back—wonderful memories that can be lived all over again in an arm-chair, or when the last call comes and the pale grey horizon is very close.

Twenty miles out to sea in a southerly direction lies another Elysium—the Pearl Islands; and this vicinity I say without hesitation is the greatest big-game fishing centre in the world. It is the home of immense sword-fish, corbina, and tunney; in fact the waters teem with denizens of the deep. Off the Pearl Islands swarm great sharks, manta or giant rays that run up to two tons in weight; in all it is a fisherman's paradise of which he dreams. Even as I write the urge is strong in me to return there—and go I shall.

One can live here in luxury; there is no more delightful and picturesque hotel in the world than the Aspinwall on

Taboga Island. At night as one sits on the balcony with the full moon streaming down and varnishing the delicate fronds of the royal palms, the Pacific wavelets gently lap the rocks below in a soothing lullaby. It is a place for dreams—a heaven on earth. Go there and drink the nectar that awaits you, the exotic libation which absolute peace, contentment, and unspoiled beauty alone can bring.

All the time the ship had been steaming past the islands neither of us had spoken; and it was only as we rounded the point of Taboguilla and headed for the Panama Canal, nine miles off, that we turned away, so absorbed had we been in our reflections.

Nine short miles—and Panama.

CHAPTER XXXV

PEERLESS PANAMA—BACK TO CIVILIZATION

WE had an enthusiastic welcome from friends as the boat docked at Balboa, which is at the entrance to the canal on the Pacific side of Panama.

"We heard you were coming, and we're sure glad to see you and the lady again," they greeted us.

Were there any customs officers? I didn't see them. I saw some old friends disguised as such, but that's all. I do know that, in accordance with the unvarying courtesy one always finds in Panama, none of our baggage was opened, and that I have no memory, in the pleasure of landing, of how or when it was moved off the boat. We arrived ultimately at the International Hotel to be welcomed by the cheery Mac and his wife. It was great to be back here again—back on the old isthmus—Panama, the gateway of the world.

Here one can live, breathe, and expand. The Republic has no army or navy to keep up; only a native police force, which is most efficient. There are no restrictions and no inquisitorial tax-collectors. Chink and West Indian negro, Jap and Indian mix without racial animosity; Spaniard, American, and English all having their little sets yet intermingling freely. A few snobs, a few rapid ladies, and of course a sprinkling of chronic "drunks" and adventurers. What matter? A little scandal, a little flirtation, love, and laughter; it is Panama and countries like her that to-day are the lands of the free. True, there is a white line—a line of demarcation—drawn across the roads in places; on the one side it is Panamanian territory,

on the other United States, which is the difference between wet and dry. This is supposed to be a restriction on the part of the United States Government, but it doesn't matter a tinker's cuss. If one wants a drink at any time of the day or night one can always get it on either side of the line.

Panama has no room for psalm-singing hypocrites, nor the antiquated elimination of all pleasures on the Lord's day. At the Juan Franco Race-course on a Sunday—what a crowd! Every nationality under the sun—white, black, and yellow—a seething heterogeneous collection of humanity gesticulating and shouting in all languages. Spontaneous, real, alive, vital.

But perhaps the most remarkable sight of all is a boxing contest here. It should not be missed, and will never be forgotten. Special trains are run from Panama City across the isthmus to Colon, and vice versa. The people flock in their thousands, and the scenes of excitement are past belief.

It was like old times to meet Captain Payne again and his charming wife. The captain stands six feet three, is British to the backbone and a damned good sportsman. He has made his fortune here, probably owing to freedom from the worry of taxes and other restrictions. Anyway, he has built himself a miniature palace with a gorgeous swimming-pool out in Bella Vista, about two miles from the capital.

Many people still seem to imagine that Panama City and Colon are only semi-civilized, but in many ways they are more up to date than any city in Great Britain. Neither England nor the United States can boast of a finer club than the Union, and here, if not a snob, one will always find a welcome from the large-hearted, hospitable Panamanians. The dances held here are events to be remembered; the gowns and air of the women, the cut of the men's clothes, the excellent bands and equally excellent

champagne give one to think furiously when one recollects evenings in certain much-vaunted clubs in other countries. There is the Miramar Club; the most fastidious connoisseur could find no fault with the cuisine. It has a French and an Italian chef, and a wonderful dancing floor. And withal there is a romantic beauty, for both this and the Union Club stand on the sea-shore. The sybarite may well rejoice on arriving in this wonderful little Republic, may well exclaim—"Here is Utopia."

Directly across the road from where we were staying is a cabaret with its galaxy of beauty. What stories could be told of incidents that have happened here! Names famous throughout the world have sat at the little tables until the early hours of the morning, forgetting their greatness and becoming just normal beings. And far from being overawed by the omnipotence of their patrons, the little cabaret ladies drink, joke, and laugh with them, and—tell it not in Gath—petting-parties have been known.

Panama is the home of a body of sportsmen second to none in the world. Here are big-game fishermen; not the figments of newspaper and magazine articles, but men who go out and battle with the monsters that lurk in the waters of the Pacific; men like Bill Markham, who could write ten books on his experiences, every one packed with thrilling incident, vivid and pulsating with the real thing. Señor Typaldos, chief of the *Star and Herald*, that most up-to-date newspaper: watch him fight a great swordfish from his little launch! There is a jolly crowd that goes out from the Zone with Kaufman in his boat the *Hope*. They are not fair-weather anglers; they will leave for the Pearl Islands in a hurricane of wind and rain, and come back a day or two later with a ton or more of fish.

And only a few miles away on either side of the narrow band of country intersected by the canal are vast tracts of jungle, much of which is still awaiting the foot of the adventurer. There are mighty rivers; Lady Brown and

I some years ago explored several of them and found them to be the home of immense alligators. These regions are inhabited by primitive Indian races which have remained unchanged through the ages with all their ancient customs, ritual, witch-doctors, and paganism.

A short distance from the capital is Old Panama City, and the Gold Road of the Spaniards which runs through the jungle from the Pacific side to the ancient little town of Porto Bello on the Caribbean Sea. There are tales to lure, of the Spanish Conquistadores, the galleons of Spain sailing from Porto Bello laden with treasure wrung by blood and torture from the Indians as far away as Peru. Tales to send the blood pulsing through the veins. How easily, when in Panama, can one conjure up a picture of the sack of Old Panama City by Sir Henry Morgan and his piratical buccaneers. Standing on the ruined fortifications at Porto Bello looking at the old guns lying there dismounted, one can scarcely believe that the town, which no doubt the Spaniards deemed impregnable, could ever have been captured. Only men who knew not the meaning of the word "defeat" could have accomplished what on the face of it was an impossibility. Sir Henry Morgan, seeing that his ships could not creep up the channel from the sea owing to the guns of the forts commanding the passage, refusing to be beaten, gave orders that his cannon should be taken ashore, by sheer man-power hauled up the steep sides of a hill, and there placed in a position to dominate the town. Unobserved by the enemy this herculean task was accomplished, and one can imagine the consternation of the Spaniards when they discovered the impossible had been achieved. The manner in which Porto Bello was captured will for all time remain inscribed as a superhuman feat.

Wherever one goes, Panama is steeped in an atmosphere of romantic tradition, a part of the people, history ineffaceable, to be handed down for all time.

Had we consulted our own wishes we should have remained months in the Republic, but that venerable figure, Father Time, beckoned, and perforce we obeyed.

I must record the unfailing courtesy of the United States Government in placing at our disposal a special coach, transporting all our ethnological specimens, without damaging one of the many hundreds, across the isthmus to Colon and thence onto the boat in which we reluctantly sailed away. We both hated leaving. As we passed through the great break-water in Colon Harbour and headed for the open sea we felt downright miserable.

We were watching the Washington Hotel receding into the distance, when several aeroplanes rose from France Field and swept over the ship, banking, looping, and performing the most hair-raising stunts. They gave us a send-off we shall neither of us forget. Finally, after rising to a great height, they shot downwards, and with their engines all out roared along within fifty feet of the boat at a breathless speed, and within a few minutes disappeared.

All journeys have to end, and we were on the last lap home. As we passed the Sister Cays at the entrance to Porto Bello Harbour, and later came in sight of Isla Grandi, regretfully I thought of our expedition down the coast some years before in our little yacht *Cara*. An hour or two later we could just make out, like faint smudges on the horizon, one or two sentinel atolls of the San Blas Archipelago, and longed that the old days when we lived among the San Blas and Chucunaque Indians could return.

Uneventfully we arrived at Cartagena with its picturesque approach through the narrow channel where the old Spanish fort is built on a sand-bar, and the quaint old town stands behind the historical walls largely made of immense coral blocks. There is no need for me to dwell on the delightful little Dutch island capital of Curaçao. Here we were highly amused at the way the ship was coaled. Passing from the Panama coaling stations, which are the

last word in mechanical efficiency and are second to none in the world, we were again plunged into the primitive. The coaling in Curaçao is done by gangs of natives carrying the fuel on their heads in baskets, and by that slow and laborious means the ship's bunkers, after many hours, are replenished.

From here we steamed for La Guiara, the gateway of Venezuela. The scenery is magnificent, the mountains rising for thousands of feet behind the little town which nestles below, lapped by the waters of the Caribbean. The new tarmac road built from La Guiara as far as Caracas, the capital of the Republic, is a great engineering feat. We roamed round Caracas, and as we returned revelled in the marvellous sunset which crimsoned the tops of the mountains with living fire.

Our roving was nearly over. A fortnight later, early one morning we passed the Scilly Isles, rocky outposts of home, and in a few hours landed at Plymouth with a tremendous amount of baggage, hundreds of specimens that we had excavated in the Maya ruins for the British Museum, and a small menagerie collected on our travels for the Zoological Society in London. This included a young puma, a pair of those quaint creatures, armadilloes, an ant-eater, and three enormous anacondas. The largest of these snakes was over seventeen feet long and as thick as a man's thigh. With the assistance of the port officials and the Great Western Railway they were safely housed on the train en route for London.

It was the end of the trail. To get back into civilization was unreal—something was lacking. As the train rushed through Reading I turned to Lady Brown, who had not spoken for an hour.

"I wonder what you're thinking about?" She seemed to shake herself out of a reverie. "Aren't you glad to get back?" I enquired.

She smiled slowly, then answered with marked hesitation,



COALING AT CURACAO



LA GUIARA. A GATEWAY OF VENEZUELA

“ I don't know whether I am or not. I wonder.”

I was wondering too. We hardly spoke again until we were nearing London.

“ Well,” I remarked somewhat banally, “ A few minutes, and we're there.” I stood up. “ Why, you're looking quite unhappy,” I exclaimed.

“ I can't help it,” she answered. “ I have an unaccountable feeling of depression. I think it's the greyness—the sky, the houses—everything. It's all grey.”

But with both of us it was deeper than this. It was the knowledge that we were back in civilization that depressed us. There was an intangible but insistent something that dragged at us; something that had crept into our blood—the lure, the sensuous, overwhelming, damnable lure from which there is no escape—calling, calling—the lure of the tropics.

